

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Friday, April 24, 1992**

10:00 a.m.

Date: 92/04/24

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country.

Amen.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give notice that I will move at the conclusion of question period

that the Assembly extend its congratulations and best wishes to the scientific team of NASA's Cosmic Background Explorer for the discovery of some of the most ancient structures in the universe, which is among the most significant scientific discoveries of our time.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to the Legislative Assembly today four copies of the Alberta Sport Council annual review for the fiscal year April 1, 1990, to March 31, '91.

MR. FJORBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file with the Assembly the response to Written Question 163, submitted by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, regarding the integrated resource plans for the northeast and Peace River regions.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, as follow-up to the special education action plan and the Minister's Forum on Special Education, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly today a consultation paper regarding special education entitled the placement of exceptional students. I would ask all members of the Assembly to get copies of this and distribute it far and wide in their constituency for feedback to the government.

MR. SPEAKER: Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a letter from the Member for Vegreville to my colleagues in the Alberta Legislature requesting their assistance in determining who is the oldest person living in the province of Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Minister of the Environment.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table with the Assembly the Bow corridor bibliography, the final report.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and the members of the Assembly this morning two class groups from the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The Ellerslie school group comes with their teachers Mr. Hetherington and Mrs. Cook. The group from Ekota school is accompanied by their teachers Mr. Don Briggs and Miss Marina Kowalchuk. I'd ask all of them to please rise now and receive our very warm welcome.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. CHIVERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to the Assembly this morning some visitors from a school in the Edmonton-Strathcona constituency, King Edward school. There are two classes consisting of 51 students, 27 in the public gallery and the rest in the members' gallery. They are accompanied by their teachers Ms Evelyn Skakun and Heather Brunette and by a parent helper Ms Marty Pool. I'd ask them to rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Additional?

MR. CHIVERS: Mr. Speaker, I also have one other group, which is an exchange program from Trois-Rivières in Quebec with the Maurice Lavallée school. There are 60 visitors in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Marc Motut and Diane Noel and several teachers from Trois-Rivières: Mrs. Fortin, Mrs. Corneau, and Mr. Robert Laframboise. I'd ask that they rise and be recognized by the Assembly. Welcome to Alberta.

MR. MAIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce someone in the members' gallery who is probably not expecting this, but I'd like to introduce Tom Eger, who is the president of the Edmonton-Jasper Place Progressive Conservative Association, and in his spare time he is also heavily involved with Stuart Olson Construction in the building of our new brand new, shiny, spanking, glorious city hall. Tom.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

National Consumer Week

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, next week is the third annual National Consumer Week. Across Canada from April 27 to May 2 governments, businesses, and consumer groups will be strengthening their commitment to a fair and honest marketplace with special projects and events.

Alberta's theme, Plain language: it's everybody's business, underlines the leading role this province has taken to promote clear language in all industries. Plain language means better business and satisfied customers. Whether you're buying a house, renting a car, getting insurance, or trying to put your children's toys together, clear and concise information is indispensable.

From travel industry seminars on plain language in Fort McMurray to theatrical groups giving credit information to Calgary students, Albertans are involved with this consumer week. These many projects will enhance action initiated by this government through the Financial Consumers Act, the government's plain language program, and other consumer, business, and government plain language initiatives.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, it certainly would be difficult to disagree with the ministerial statement and come out against National Consumer Week. All of us obviously want to strengthen our commitment to a fair and honest marketplace.

In this spirit, then, next week being the third annual National Consumer Week, there are a couple of suggestions I might make to the minister. First of all, let's deal with the Bench Insurance affair in terms of some of the legislative amendments that we brought forward or at least give us a statement on what we're going to do with that, and let's look at some fairness for those consumers who were bitten badly in that situation.

I also expect next week then – there are a lot of consumers that are renters – that we will see the Landlord and Tenant Amend-

ment Act finally proclaimed, Mr. Speaker. So in the spirit of cooperation we look forward to something happening on that.

head:

Oral Question Period

MLA Remuneration

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, the controversy surrounding MLA allowances goes on and on and on and on. If I may say so, this is created by what I consider the stubborn refusal of the Premier to submit this to an independent commission and deal with this matter once and for all. But being the optimist that I am, I prefer to look at a glimmer of hope in the Premier's response yesterday, when he said, I believe, that in the longer term he has an open mind about an independent commission. My follow-up to the Premier on this is: now that the Premier has had time to think about this matter, will he clarify to the members of the Assembly what he meant by having an open mind on an independent review?

10:10

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out yesterday, I've had the experience in the Legislature – and I think probably many of the members here have – of having both an assessment made by independent commissions and assessment and recommendations made as well by Members' Services. In those cases they've tended to work out relatively fairly. My position yesterday was to say that while we are dealing now with a concern that has caused members of all parties to be uncertain about their position with regard to the capital city living allowance, that should be referred to the all-party Members' Services Committee. On a longer term basis I have an open mind in terms of: should we have independent assessment of the whole package of MLA remuneration? That's always been my position in the past, and I expressed it again yesterday.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier has an open mind about the whole package, that's precisely what we've been calling for. I would say to the Premier right now that there's a fair amount of political carnage going on out there, and this issue is not going to go away.

If the Premier has an open mind on this, I again ask: to deal with this issue right now, why don't we put the whole package to an independent commission? This would stop the problems that we have right now, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans would respect their politicians more.

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I went into it to some extent yesterday with the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Party. I pointed out to them that when you get advice, that is all it can be in our legislative system, that finally the advice must come to the members here in the Legislature and they must assess it and make a decision. I know that these issues are difficult for elected people, but that's the way the system works. You finally have to do it here.

Some elected people unfortunately get so terrified of that part of their responsibility that they move in irrational ways. The Leader of the Opposition yesterday stood up and said, "Will the Premier now appoint an independent commission to review MLAs' salaries?" I pointed out to him that they're frozen until 1994. What would the commission do? Then the leader of the Liberal Party came up shortly after him and said: Look, I'm so terrified about this, would you please just say that we'll agree to anything? Right now the Liberals are prepared to agree to anything: it doesn't matter what the independent group of people do, we agree; we're so scared of this issue that we agree.

Now, unfortunately we're elected here to take responsibility for some difficult things, and that's the point I was making with the members. [some applause]

MR. MARTIN: You may pound your desks all you like. That's not the reality. Leading is not being stubborn and putting your head in the sand and not listening to your constituents. That's not leadership; that's foolishness, Mr. Speaker. It's a red herring. So the salaries are frozen. They may call for a 20 percent cut for the Premier. You could look at it that way.

My question is simply this. The Premier has said at other times that he is now into parliamentary reform, including, as I understand it, the possibility of free votes on issues. Well, Mr. Speaker, let's send a double message here and leave it up to the members, if that's what he wants. Can the Premier now give his rhetoric some meaning and allow this Assembly to decide on the basis of a free vote whether MLA compensation should be submitted to an independent review?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, if I understand the hon. member, even though the salaries are now frozen till 1994, he wants to set up a commission to work on it. That sounds so silly. I don't know why he's taking that position. They're frozen. What would a commission do?

MR. SPEAKER: Second . . . [interjection] No. Order please. Second main question, please.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, if he wants to take cheap shots, I'm going to right back. [interjections] You bet. Albertans want to know what their Premier is doing. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question. Let's go.

MR. MARTIN: Oh, they're getting excited. They're feeling the pressure, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. [interjections] Order in the whole House, please. [interjections] Order in the whole House, please.

Second main question, Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to designate it to the Member for Vegreville.

Agriculture Department Downsizing

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, when the government announced job cuts and layoffs last week involving some 77 positions in the Department of Agriculture, they made it sound like numbers on a piece of paper, statistics and nothing more. Well, I've been getting calls from rural Albertans all week who are angered by the mindless approach used to cut jobs including, for example, district agriculturists in Vegreville and Two Hills. I'd like to ask the Premier, who's supposed to know and care about the many problems that confront rural Albertans, how he can stand idly by and allow his Minister of Agriculture to cut important frontline positions from people who provide valuable service to rural Albertans.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the decisions that were made in rural communities were not made lightly. They were made with great consideration and consultation. Our desire and our wish is to provide service to our agricultural producers and agribusiness in rural communities. We have committed to continue to provide

that service, and although we have had to make some changes, the service will still be provided to those producers.

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, we have more ministers, more bureaucracy wasting money while cutting important frontline jobs. That's not what Albertans want. They want us to spend their money carefully, according to commonsense priorities. I'd like to ask the Premier how he can justify having twice as many ministers of Agriculture as we need, costing an additional \$278,000 a year, while cutting important frontline jobs around the province.

MR. GETTY: We don't have that situation, Mr. Speaker.

MR. FOX: The Member for Macleod used to be able to do it on his own, Mr. Speaker. Surely you can find someone better than the Member for Bonnyville to be the Minister of Agriculture.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the government has cut regional 4-H jobs from places like Vermilion, people who work directly with young Albertans to help them develop agricultural, interpersonal, and leadership skills. I'd like to ask the Premier how he can justify those cuts, tolerate those cuts, knowing that his government wastes up to \$200,000 a year on the Alberta Grain Commission, which is nothing more than a patronage refuge for tired Tories.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure the House that there's been no support removed from 4-H clubs in this province. What we have done is change some support people in a leadership way. What in fact we have done I think is responsible in making some changes. To ensure that we can continue to give that support to the clubs, to their volunteer leaders, we have amalgamated some positions. I can assure the member that our commitment to 4-H and the great value that it provides to our young people in this province is as strong as ever.

I will also assure the member that we will continue to deliver that support to our clubs, to our leaders, to those hundreds of volunteers in this province that work with 4-H clubs to deliver that program, which is today and will remain the most effective, I believe, in Canada. So we will be working with them. Our district home economists play a great role in working with 4-H. That commitment will increase as well as continue, but there will be no reduction of this government's commitment of support to the very valuable contribution that 4-H has made in this province for over 75 years.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Glengarry, on behalf of the Liberal Party.

10:20

Gainers Inc.

MR. DECORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta taxpayers have pumped something like \$67 million into the Gainers operations in Alberta. The Auditor General in his most recent report notes the tremendous losses that Gainers has incurred and also notes, even though the government has taken over Gainers, that Gainers has yet to file a financial statement for the most recent year. Once burned, you'd think, twice shy. I'd like to ask the Provincial Treasurer why the government is now offering three prospective buyers of Gainers further taxpayer financial support?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, we're not doing that.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to then put the question to the Minister of Agriculture, who has indicated in Red Deer that financial support is being offered to three prospective buyers. I'd

like the minister to give us the specific details of what he's telling those specific buyers.

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no idea what the hon. member is talking about. I at no time, in Red Deer or anywhere else, indicated that this government was giving financial support to any prospective buyers. I have confirmed that we are in discussions with prospective buyers, but the intent is certainly not to be in any way financially supporting a buyer.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the government has been a big loser in this whole Gainers matter, and the people of Alberta have told the government to stay out of the marketplace. I want a commitment from the Minister of Agriculture that no financial assistance will be given to any buyer of Pocklington's enterprise.

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry or maybe his adviser the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon may be hearing from producers out there, what I'm hearing, particularly from the producers in northern Alberta, is: thank God this government had the political will to take that plant and keep it operating to serve the northern producer. I had that input as recently as last night from a group of producers that were expressing extreme disappointment that the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon really didn't understand their industry and could I do anything to educate him. I assured them that I had tried and had not succeeded.

Human Rights Commission

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, as some hon. members will be aware, and I believe there are several in this Assembly, the Individual's Rights Protection Act was introduced on May 5, 1972. The 20th anniversary of that introduction will be falling within just over a week. With that in mind, I'd like to ask the Premier a question, as I understand that the appointment of commissioners is still done by order in council. With that responsibility, would the Premier clarify the comments that are now being made by the chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission as to his future with the commission?

MR. GETTY: I'll try to, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is certainly correct in that the appointment is a cabinet decision. The appointment of the chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission has not been discussed at cabinet, hasn't been discussed in any way. I'm trying to contact the chief commissioner to discuss the matter with him, but certainly no decision has been made nor has the decision process even started at the cabinet level.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, with that in mind, would the Premier indicate when that process would begin and when an appointment, whether it is the present chief commissioner or another, would be made public?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, working to the end of May as a decision process, it would certainly come before cabinet in the coming days and weeks and a decision announced as soon as it is made.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Avonmore, followed by Calgary-McKnight.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier also. They're in regard to the chief commissioner for

the Human Rights Commission, whose position is unclear at this point but certainly may require replacement. The public is crying out for open and honest government, so if a replacement for the human rights commissioner is in fact necessary, it is an opportunity for this government to demonstrate a willingness to respond to the public outcry. Would the Premier, then, given that this position was secretly upgraded to the level of a deputy minister, commit to hiring a new chief commissioner, if in fact that is necessary, through open competition and consider establishing an all-party committee with equal representation from all parties to do that?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member was obviously caught in the line of questions. That question's already been dealt with. The hon. member, if she'd just consider my answer to the Member for Three-Hills, would understand that she's raised a hypothetical situation.

MS M. LAING: Mr. Speaker, the decision to reappoint the human rights commissioner will come up the end of May. Will the Premier at this time commit to that decision being made by an all-party committee composed of equal representation from all three parties in the House?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should understand that responsibilities of the government have to be fulfilled by the government. If I followed the kind of method that the hon. members take on this responsibility, I would imagine that if it got to be a tough decision, they'd want an independent commission finally to do it.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is similar but actually quite different.

AN HON. MEMBER: Read it anyhow.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you. Thank you.

Certain public functions are so critically important that they must be kept away from partisan politics, and this government has traditionally attached those functions to the Legislature and not to the government in power. The Ombudsman and the Auditor General are examples. My question is also to the Premier. Will the Premier commit his government to amending the Individual's Rights Protection Act so that the commissioner becomes an officer who reports to the Legislative Offices Committee and is hired by that Legislative Offices Committee?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member realizes, I have dealt with the matter, but I think in a very charming way she has presented a bit of a representation which I would certainly think about in the future.

MRS. GAGNON: I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to hear that response because the human rights of Albertans are too important to be tainted with perceived patronage appointments.

If the minister does amend the Act, would he also consider seeing to it that an emphasis is placed by this commissioner on education and public relations? That mandate is not being fulfilled at the moment.

10:30

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the charm has slipped away from the hon. member's question. Surely now she's reflecting on the

existing member, and I don't think it's proper to do it here in the Legislature.

MR. SPEAKER: Drumheller, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Propane Buses

MR. SCHUMACHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the fall of 1991 near Carseland, in my constituency, a unibody school bus was struck from the rear by a semitrailer truck. The bus was equipped with a propane fuel system. As a result of the collision and subsequent fire, three of the five occupants were killed. Shortly after the collision the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities formed a task force to review the collision and to make recommendations concerning fuel systems in unibody buses. Could the Minister of Transportation and Utilities please advise the Assembly who was represented on the task force and the status of its work?

MR. ADAIR: Mr. Speaker, the task force was made up of some members from the University of Alberta, the Department of Labour, the Department of Energy, the propane association of Canada, and the Department of Transportation and Utilities. They were the task force that we assigned to look at the safety features of the unibody buses, and I clarify that it's the unibody bus we're talking about. That's the smaller one that's used mainly by DATS and school boards. After some physical and technical testing the recommendations that came from that task force to us indicated that the reinforcement of the back bumper situation and a little bit different placement of the propane tank itself would increase the safety features for any of the buses that use propane.

I might also point out, Mr. Speaker, that there is not the availability of a bus from the manufacturers with a propane tank. They all come in with gasoline tanks, and then you must convert. The cost of conversion of course has been handled by the school boards and the owners of the buses. What we've done as a result of the recommendations that have now been forwarded to the propane association of Canada and the Department of Labour in Alberta is recommend that these be approved and that they then be utilized by all of the school boards and school buses, and that, in turn, will happen.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I thank the minister for his answer but would ask him whether there's going to be any consideration given to financial assistance to those people who have to make these modifications.

MR. ADAIR: Mr. Speaker, yes. As a matter of fact, when we made the announcement yesterday, we indicated that there would be assistance. The existing old program, which was in place when we developed the problem as a result of the accident and the urgency at that particular time of hopefully having some buses consider the recommendation that we made – it was not mandatory; it was voluntary – to, in fact, convert back to gasoline while we dealt with the issue, has been extended now for the feature of reinforcement of the bumper and the placement of the tanks to all of those owners and operators of that particular bus. They have a deadline of September 1 of 1992, which gives them the summer, from the school board point of view, to do those corrections again on a voluntary basis. Until they're approved at the federal level, they would not be mandatory, but once approved, they would.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View.

Olympia & York Developments Limited

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of public works was unwilling to provide details to this House about their lease agreement with Olympia & York for downtown office space here in Edmonton. Today we find the government claiming that they paid \$8.75 per square foot to rent the O & Y property. Well, they paid more than \$9 million to that company in 1990, so using the minister's figures, which may very well be in doubt, it means that they rented over a million square feet in a building with less than 600,000 square feet of rentable space. Will the minister now tell us just how many square feet they are really renting in that project, and will he finally tell us the true rental rate that they're paying?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services did not refuse to provide information yesterday. You know darn well that on many occasions when a question's been asked, I've often said that I'd be happy to provide the information. You can't take hundreds and hundreds of pages of a lease and do a précis in a matter of minutes, but I will try in terms of conveying the information, and I hope that nobody will say, "Sit down."

Mr. Speaker, when you deal with a lease, there are a whole variety of permutations and combinations that you can deal with. First of all, we've leased 400,000 square feet, and the amount of the lease in the first year is \$9.6 million. But in addition to that, we have as part of the agreement that the total cost is inclusive of all operating costs and taxes. Secondly, we also have built in to the lease an additional 20,253 square feet of storage that's included in the facility. The lease also includes 397 parking stalls that are free for the first five years of the agreement.

Now, when somebody wants to lease something – a house, a building, an apartment – they can lease it completely furnished, renovated in the interior, or simply a raw building. In this case, the lease includes some \$8 million worth of tenant allowances for improvements within the whole thing, and in addition to that, there was a further negotiated involvement of some \$2 million attributable to an exchange that occurred during the development of the lease. When you work it all through, the figure that I gave after the question period yesterday is the correct figure. This results in a net effective rate for the first five years of this term of \$8.75 per square foot.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister was suddenly using parking space as part of his calculations to confuse the apparent rental rate. So if we were just to take the 420,000 square feet at \$8.75 per square foot, that's \$3.7 million. Yet Olympia & York got \$9.5 million from the government. Taking the minister at his word, that means . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Forgive me, hon. member. I'm sorry, but this line of questioning is so detailed that it really is a motion for a return. Please ask the question very briefly.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, if they're paying \$5.8 million and they've got 400 parking stalls, that works out to about \$14,000 per stall. I'm just wondering if the minister could justify to the taxpayers paying more than \$14,000 per year for parking stalls in downtown Edmonton.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat again – and *Hansard* has these parameters that are associated with it – that including the \$8 million-plus in terms of the improvements, the

parking stalls that are in place for some five years, the net effective rate on an annual basis is \$8.75 per square foot for this first year. Now, it's pretty naive for any hon. member to stand up and basically say: well, parking is not part of a parameter in terms of leasing space in the downtown of a city. One can go out and buy a house by simply saying, yes, you buy a house. You can also buy a house with the property or a house without the property. You can buy a house that's furnished or unfurnished. You can buy a house that has local improvements, your sidewalks and your streets, done or your sidewalks and your streets not included. The same kind of principles apply when you deal with leases anywhere in the province of Alberta. Those parameters are dealt with under the marketplace conditions at a given time, and they hold through for a certain period of time. The O & Y agreement was a 20-year agreement built in segments of five years each.

I'll repeat what I said yesterday. There are questions on the Order Paper. I'd be very happy to deal with them in a more specific way. I'd be delighted to go before the Public Accounts Committee, a committee that's chaired by a member of the opposition party, and deal with this matter. The estimates of Public Works, Supply and Services will also be coming up during this session, and any hon. member, if they want to look back in *Hansard*, will see that I've already made comments on O & Y. I'd be happy to do it again. But to the hon. member: please, let's deal with fact and the truth instead of fantasy. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Highlands, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud, if we get that far.

Physician Assistants

MS BARRETT: Good point.

Mr. Speaker, certain Edmonton hospitals lately have taken to the practice of hiring what they call physician assistants. These people are trained in the U.S. It's a two-year diploma. What happens is this: if the doctor isn't on the ward at the moment, these guys come in like pretend doctors, and they take charge. They can order drugs on doctors' order sheets, and by the way, they supervise nurses, even bachelor of science nurses. The really critical element here is that these physician assistants earn between \$60,000 and \$70,000 a year, about twice as much as nurses. My question to the Health minister is this: is she not concerned that this is an unnecessary additional cost to the health care system when nurses can perform the same types of duties?

10:40

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, practising medicine in this province without a licence is illegal under the Medical Profession Act. If the member has some information she'd like me to check, I'd be more than happy to do so for her.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is not a brand new development. It's been going on for quite a while.

The other element that the minister might want to look at is the licensing of these physician assistants. They're not licensed by any professional association, and they don't come under any government regulations. Will the minister check to see who is liable for any problem that might develop while these people are acting as pretend doctors?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the member is making a very serious allegation when she describes people employed in our health care system as "pretend doctors." If she has a complaint, it should be one that is outlined fully and frankly to the College

of Physicians and Surgeons. I do not certify physicians in this province. The college does. We have entrusted that responsibility to them under the Medical Profession Act, an Act of this Legislature, and if she would like to make the allegations in public, put it on the Order Paper, I would be more than pleased to look into it.

Video Lottery Program

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, recently the minister responsible for lotteries stated in this Assembly, and I quote: "Under the Criminal Code of Canada private ownership of devices such as video lottery terminals is not legal." Yet both the provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick have entered into ownership and operational agreements with the private sector. Will the minister inform this House as to why he continues to slap the private sector in the face in this regard?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is unable to read the Criminal Code of Canada, I'd be very happy on Monday to table in the House a copy of the Criminal Code of Canada, which confirms exactly what I said. I know that the Liberal Party gets substantial dollars each year for research, but if I have to do the research for them, I'll gladly do that. [interjection] Well, the truth is important.

Secondly, the policy that was announced on March 12 clearly indicated that VLT machines in the province of Alberta would be owned, operated, and managed by an agency of the province; in essence, Alberta Lotteries in consort with arrangements worked out with the Western Canada Lottery Corporation. That came about as advice provided to me from law enforcement agencies, not only in western Canada, but in Canada, North America, and access to law enforcement information provided in jurisdictions that have state-run and -controlled lotteries throughout the world. Mr. Speaker, that was very important advice provided in terms of security, in terms of integrity, and in terms of maximizing the efficiency for the benefit of the people, and it's advice that I've received and accepted.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the minister, I'll table in this House a copy of the appropriate section in the Criminal Code, which clearly illustrates that he is wrong. On that basis, if he will admit that he is wrong at that time, then is the minister prepared to review his earlier decision and hold further discussions with the private sector in this regard?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I really look forward to the evaluation of a phraseology in the Criminal Code that basically says that devices such as this must be retained when owned by the state. Anybody can read that, and I'm sure they can make their own conclusion.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, in the implementation of the VLT system, we've identified and the release that I put out, I think it was on March 12, 1992, indicated some 15 or 16 opportunities for the private sector in the province of Alberta, opportunities that include the provision of the major hardware that would be provided for the computer system that would be installed and provision of all the machines themselves, either the development of the machines or the sale of the machines to Alberta Lotteries. As of today we've had some 50 submissions provided to us by the private sector in this province to be involved in both of those activities. In addition to that, the venues, the places where the VLTs will be located, are private-sector operations. In some other jurisdictions in Canada – as an example, in Manitoba – the

casinos are owned by the state. They are not in the province of Alberta. We've provided those opportunities for the private sector here in the province of Alberta and also provide them with a commission effective the first week of August, which will be 15 percent of net. That release contains an additional 12 or 13 or 14 examples of opportunities for the private sector.

Communications Technology

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Speaker, economic diversification has been a key element in this government's strategy for some time, and yesterday an announcement was made for a \$10 million economic development agreement in communications technology between the government of Alberta and the government of Canada. I would ask the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications if he could identify the linkage between the announcement yesterday and meetings held in Ottawa approximately two weeks ago on information technology?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has referred to two initiatives which are I think extremely important for the province of Alberta. It's important to note that both of those initiatives reflect back to a statement made by the Premier at the first ministers' meeting on the economy wherein he referred to the type of infrastructure of tomorrow as not being roads and highways and railroads as much as communication linkages, high-speed networks and things of that order, because that certainly is the infrastructure of tomorrow.

The announcement yesterday was a joint announcement with the federal government, which involves \$10 million, \$5 million from each of the governments, that will deal with establishing commercial communications technologies in Alberta that are very, very important to the economic growth of our province. The announcement will involve \$5 million going to research and development in a new thrust of telecommunications which is in the area of wireless research and development through TRILabs. There will be about \$2 million going into microelectronics technology and a further \$3 million into information technologies. [interjections]

The link with the second initiative is that I had the opportunity to lead and be with a private sector initiated thrust in the information technologies, to meet with various federal officials and ministers. Information technologies is an area of strength and certainly is an enabling technology for future diversification. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. members. I'm sure we really don't need to keep heckling.

Taber-Warner, supplementary.

MR. BOGLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister indicate the province's role in establishing this research presence in Calgary; in other words, the province's area where it will be taking a key role relative to the federal government?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, in connection with the announcement yesterday TRILabs, which has a presence here in Edmonton, also will be establishing in Calgary a wireless research and development facility. So that is the involvement of Calgary in that regard, but other aspects of that announcement will reflect upon and benefit all Albertans.

With respect to the other initiative, there was an infraport thrust initiative from the private sector in Calgary. That has been broadened to a pan-Alberta approach that would cover a variety of facilities and infrastructure beyond the infraport idea, which is

basically data processing and distribution, into the areas of high-performance computing and high-speed network lines.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

Forest Management

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also about a federal/provincial agreement, the Canada/Alberta Partnership Agreement in Forestry, signed yesterday. Over the years the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife has justified Alberta's low stumpage rates on the basis that the timber harvesting corporations must meet strict reforestation standards at their own expense. I recall that when we scaled all of the trees in the Legislature Grounds, we couldn't find one that would sell for more than a buck under the existing stumpage formula. This four-year agreement provides a further \$10 million for reforestation and silviculture at taxpayers' expense, including such basic items as site preparation and tree planting, which is on top of \$11 million in our own budget for similar. I'd like to ask the minister why the taxpayers are paying for reforestation on quota held by such needy corporations as Daishowa, Procter & Gamble, and Weyerhaeuser?

10:50

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place has jumped on the back of the horse that wasn't saddled. I must say, first of all, that there are no dollars in this federal/provincial agreement that go for reforestation on FMA or quota land which would cover corporations like he just mentioned.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, the agreement – and I'm surprised he hasn't read it, because he signed it – provides for such reforestation expenditures on 12,000 hectares of provincial land not satisfactorily restocked. This is the third time this program has been announced since the budget. Now that the minister I'm sure is aware that our forest exports are under attack from the United States, can he tell us if he consulted with the forest industry with regard to the timing of this announcement? Are he and the industry of the view that nobody outside of our borders pays any attention to what he does here in Alberta?

MR. SPEAKER: Two questions instead of one.

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again he's wrong. What we're talking about in this federal/provincial forestry agreement is a partnership agreement. It's a very positive agreement. The areas we're talking about aren't devoid of vegetation now; frankly, they have too much. It's going to take stand tending to focus our attention on. It has no impact whatsoever on the softwood lumber tax or trade retaliation of any kind. We're talking here about a joint federal/provincial agreement that is a co-operative arrangement to do good things for the entire province, covering all areas including our watershed and wildlife as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ambulance Service

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency health care professionals in the province continue to raise very serious concerns about the mysterious ambulance regulations. The minister has received yet another letter from a key stakeholder. This time the Edmonton Emergency Physicians Association is

urging her to act. My question to the Minister of Health is: will the minister now tell us her justification for arbitrarily changing the nature of the position of medical director?

MS BETKOWSKI: I don't really understand the question, Mr. Speaker, but let me repeat again for the hon. member the process that has been gone through to get to this point with respect to the regulations under the air ambulance Act, which was passed by this Assembly in May of 1990. That process has involved probably the most extensive consultation with municipalities around this province ever undertaken by the Department of Health. We put draft regulations out for the purpose of discussion. We are reviewing those regulations now and ensuring that we have responded as best as possible to the issues raised by the stakeholders, realizing that ultimately the responsibility is to this Legislature for the delivery of health services. Those regulations have not yet been finalized, and I would be more than pleased to discuss them with the hon. member when they are.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, the unfortunate part is that the draft regulations are being done quietly, and the stakeholders are very concerned about what they contain. Will the minister therefore undertake to release these draft regulations prior to them being finalized so that the stakeholders can provide their input and be assured that Albertans and their safety in ambulance carriage are not at any risk?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, protecting the health of Albertans in whatever form is the responsibility of the Legislature in all health care legislation. What the hon. member is saying is: okay, you've gone through an extensive consultation process, and now we want to go through it again. I guess this is sort of the issue, isn't it? When do we get to the point of making a decision? We believe that the consultation has been excellent. I certainly have received reaction on some of the concerns people have, but they are based not on the final regulations but on speculation, some of which may be being fueled by these kinds of questions. The consultation process has been extensive. When the regulations are ready to be tabled, I'd be more than happy to respond to the hon. member's question on fact as opposed to speculation.

MR. SPEAKER: Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

Four groups in this order: Edmonton-Meadowlark, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Strathcona, Westlock-Sturgeon. First, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Introduction of Special Guests (reversion)

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature six students from Hillcrest school. They are accompanied by Miss Monique Moore, the adult literacy instructor from Continuing Education. I would ask that they rise in the gallery and receive the welcome of the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly a group of 13

students from Bonnie Doon high school. They're accompanied by their teachers Hugh Murray and Collette Park. I understand that they're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and be welcomed by the members.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Strathcona, for a re-run.

MR. CHIVERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I earlier introduced this group, they hadn't arrived in the gallery. This is the exchange program between Quebec and Alberta. A group of students from Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire and Trois-Rivières Ouest are in the gallery. There are 63 students here accompanied by five teachers, two teachers from the Maurice Lavallée school, the host school, Mr. Marc Motut and Miss Diane Noel, and three teachers from Quebec: Mrs. Fortin, Mrs. Corneau, and Mr. Laframboise. I'd ask that they rise in the members' gallery and be recognized by the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature 22 students from the Legal school. They're in the public gallery and are accompanied by their teachers Miss Raymonde Durocher and Mrs. Sherry Brisson, bus driver Mr. Richard Maurier, as well as parents Mrs. Audrey Lebre and Mrs. Doreen Desmond. I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Legislature.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

MR. SPEAKER: Standing Order 40 request, Edmonton-Jasper Place.

Cosmic Background Explorer

Mr. Mcinnis:

Be it resolved that the Assembly extend its congratulations and best wishes to the scientific team of NASA's Cosmic Background Explorer for the discovery of some of the most ancient structures in the universe, which is among the most significant scientific discoveries of our time.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe all members now have a copy of the motion. I won't read it again. On the matter of urgency there's very little doubt that any person who lives on this planet wonders about the origins of our universe and the meaning thereof. I would simply point out that Stephen Hawking, who is a Lucasian professor of mathematics at Cambridge University who will be visiting the city of Edmonton next month, wrote a best selling book called *A Brief History of Time* in which he observed that the discovery that the universe is expanding was one of the great intellectual revolutions of the 20th century. Until the recent discovery it was only a theory, but the theory of an expanding universe, or the big bang theory, required proof. Evidently what was discovered by the Cosmic Background Explorer is proof of the expanding universe theory, which Professor Hawking shows mathematically proves that time has a beginning. I leave it for all members to contemplate on Sunday what that means as they prepare for Earth Day celebrations.

I'd like to seek permission to move this motion of congratulations.

MR. SPEAKER: Standing Order 40 request with regard to urgency. Those in favour of letting the matter proceed, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order in the committee.

head: **Main Estimates 1992-93**

11:00

Education

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would the hon. Minister of Education care to introduce those estimates?

MR. DINNING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to you, sir. It's my pleasure to stand before Committee of Supply to present the budget proposals for the 1992-93 fiscal year. These proposals, in my view, represent a significant and ongoing investment by all Albertans into our children's future and indeed the future of our entire province. Increasingly in Alberta and across Canada people are realizing that a quality education system and excellent results for students are key ingredients not only for future competitiveness, for economic prosperity, but also for the health and well-being of our entire society. Spending on education is much more than a budget exercise. It's part of the province's investment portfolio, an investment whose return will pay off for years and years to come.

In spite of the fiscal challenges we face, our government has maintained education as a priority by increasing the funding to school boards in the next school year by nearly 5 percent, well in excess of the forecasted inflation rate. That provides a solid financial base for education, a base which has grown, Mr. Chairman – and this is not a well-known fact – by nearly \$380 million, or 26 percent, over the past three years alone.

Looking across the country, Mr. Chairman, Alberta has an education system which is the envy of many. We're known for leadership and results, and those results showed up most recently in the international assessment on educational progress where Alberta science students ranked first in Canada and third of all the participating countries from around the world. We're known for leadership in the Canadian school achievement indicators project, a project that has gotten a few NDP governments across the country a little nervous but is widely supported by Canadians from coast to coast; leadership in curriculum development, especially for our new science programs as well as our special education programs and services. The list is a long one. It is an impressive one. Quite simply, Alberta is at the forefront of education in Canada.

From a funding perspective Alberta's 3 percent grant rate increase for 1992-93 puts us ahead of increases provided in virtually every other province in the country. I'll just show you some examples, Mr. Chairman. Ontario, that great government committed to education: this year 1 percent increase in their grant rates. B.C. is under 3 percent. What has Saskatchewan done? Saskatchewan, the new NDP government in this country, has reduced its grant to education for this coming year by 2 percent and has promised to do the same thing again next year.

Mr. Chairman, I look to an authority like the Alberta School Boards Association. I'm reading from a monthly report of theirs

entitled *Spectrum*, volume 12, number 5, May 1992. I cite some comments in the executive report where it talks about the past president of the ASBA, Sandra Weidner, whom I quote from this article, who represents Alberta at CSBA, Canadian School Boards Association, meetings.

. . . learned that in [Prince Edward Island] the teachers' union is in control. The union supports and votes in MLAs. "Pay equity in PEI is a mess, when principals are paid more than superintendents," said Mrs. Weidner. "And, teacher aides are paid more than first year teachers." New Brunswick is facing a roll back in grants. Nova Scotia introduced pay equity April 1, retroactive to September 1 - boards have no money to pay for it. Newfoundland boards lost their taxing authority - an election promise fulfilled; boards will be reduced from 26 to 8 or 10 . . . Quebec boards received a grant increase of 3%, but they have rules on how the money is to be spent; lunch programs and stay-in-school programs have been legislated; boards in Quebec are more centralized than in [any] other provinces, and it appears the government wants to do away with boards completely. The Ontario government's priority is labour legislation; it probably won't be good for boards which are painted as 'slashers and burners' by the teachers' union; boards have less consultation with [the Ontario] government than with previous governments.

Well, I've only got page 1. I'm sorry. It could go on and on. I'm sure that if I had the other pages, those comments by the Alberta School Boards Association would put Alberta in a shining light not only absolutely but surely by comparison.

Mr. Chairman, two very important messages in the '92-93 budget proposals. The first is a continuing focus on results. As the Treasurer pointed out in his Budget Address, provincial education funding will increasingly be tied to performance and to results. Albertans have consistently told us that they're prepared to continue their significant investment in education but they want to see results. They want to see tangible, measurable signs of student progress and student achievement, measurable indicators that our students are able to compete with their peers around the world. They want to see the dropout rate go down and go down substantially. They want to see better preparation for those students who are going directly into the work force, and they want to see the results orientation that is spelled out in the vision document to be the guide for our actions in the years ahead.

The second key message in our budget, Mr. Chairman, is a commitment to holding the line on spending increases. An attitude has developed among some in the education system - and I know some of my colleagues who sit in the opposition benches have fallen into this trap - that improvements to our results cannot be achieved without more money. They say that nothing new can be done without more money. Well, we need to replace that attitude, replace it with a new approach, a new way of doing things, approaches like what's going on in Calgary at the Ernest Morrow junior high school. Principal Chuck Rose and his staff have taken a school of 750 students, where they had some problems a year ago, and they've changed that. They've taken that one school and effectively made it into five schools of 150 students each so that teachers and students get to know one another, where there is an environment where students can learn better. That didn't take any more money. It just took the creative juices of people like Chuck Rose and his staff.

I think of Jasper Place composite high school in the city of Edmonton where they're trying so hard to get kids back to school. They want to challenge the dropout problem. Where are they going to challenge it? They're going where the kids are. They're going to West Edmonton Mall where an awful lot of kids seem to hang out. They're providing them with counseling services, and they're even considering opening classrooms in West Edmonton Mall to meet the needs of the kids who are there to make sure

they get a high school education. Mr. Chairman, all that is creativity and ingenuity. It isn't a case of more and more and more money. The cycle of more and more money is one that we simply can't continue.

I think of the governor of the state of Maine who when speaking about a year ago to a group of trustees, and others I believe, made this comment. I think it's very fitting.

By breaking the cycle of funding increases in our schools, we force a change from expensive inputs to learning-oriented outcomes. We have the opportunity to realign our educational efforts to focus on creative solutions to our needs.

Jasper Place composite and Ernest Morrow junior high school are just two of many if not hundreds of examples of that kind of creativity and realigning of what we've always done.

Mr. Chairman, this is not the time to talk to taxpayers about more tax money, especially if we cannot demonstrate clear progress in improving results with the money that we are spending now. School boards need to use their own results as the driver for setting budget priorities.

I'll go through the four key priorities in this budget quickly, Mr. Chairman. The first is career and technology studies and making sure that the programs are there to give students practical, relevant, and exciting courses to prepare them to enter the work force, to explore career fields, to develop a particular skill or interest, and certainly to complement their academic studies.

11:10

The second priority relates to the special education review, in particular the improved co-ordination of services to meet children's needs. Some exciting things are happening in local communities. I think of the community for children initiative by a Calgary group of private citizens, Mr. Chairman. I think of the behavioral adaptation program in the same city. There are a whole bunch of those kinds of grass-roots initiatives by school boards, by community agencies, by health units, and others working together to address children's needs in their own communities. More needs to be done locally, and certainly more needs to be done provincially in order to create the environment where those good ideas that flow up can have obstacles removed by provincial rules or regulations or laws and by the ministers responsible.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, we're also extending special education block grants to include accredited private schools. Children with special needs deserve quality programs regardless of whether they attend a public or a private school. So following through on the recommendations of the special education review committee, beginning with the 1992-93 school year private schools will receive 75 percent of the per pupil special education block grant. This amounts to an increase of \$145 per student. Thirdly, moving forward on a policy for the placement of exceptional children, I filed in the Assembly today a consultation paper that will form the basis of future policy in this important area.

The third priority area touches on a number of initiatives outlined in the vision document. First, the new two-count system. This time next year we will implement a second count, on April 30, and over the next few years we will monitor the impact on reducing Alberta's dropout rate. Secondly, we're implementing new science programs as outlined in that vision document, a revised science program throughout all of high school, including science 10 beginning in September of 1992, which will be followed by science 20 and 30 in the subsequent years. Thirdly, putting in place new diagnostic programs for junior high students to help teachers assess students' problems and focus their learning strategies. Fourthly, putting in place a new student information system - the Provincial Treasurer referred to this in his Budget

Address – a system that will give us better information to track students' progress, information that over time will improve our programs, will allow teachers to improve the delivery of their programs, and in the end improve student results.

The fourth key area, Mr. Chairman, is building confidence in education. By setting clear standards, by setting high expectations about what we want to achieve, by helping teachers and students to achieve those results, and by showing our progress towards meeting our expectations, we will achieve two objectives. One, we'll put an education system in place which is second to none, and secondly, we'll show Albertans that they have every reason to be confident in the investment they are making in their education system.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, this couldn't happen without the dedication and talent of an awful lot of people, a lot of very fine professional people who work in our schools, in our classrooms, in our offices across this province. I am blessed with several very talented professionals who work within the Department of Education and work within the office of the Minister of Education. I will not name names; they know who they are, and they are valuable people with whom I am proud to work and, frankly, couldn't get along without.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I say to you that to meet our priorities and to continue with our comprehensive agenda for action in education, I am asking approval of the Legislative Assembly today for the budget proposal that I have laid before you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSZYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was going to commend the minister on his budget, because I know he had some heavy things to wrestle with, namely his vision, which he knows I don't quite always refer to as a vision, and also the problem with equity that hasn't gone away. I know the minister's intentions were honourable, but I guess he doesn't have the support of his caucus colleagues, because those particular aspects weren't addressed.

I would like to assume that a budget is supposed to indicate the priorities for a department. In this particular case with Education, the department that we're dealing with deals with children. I heard a little bit about special-needs students, and that was about it. I'm, quite frankly, extremely disappointed in the minister's reading lessons, because I couldn't find the point of what was happening in Ontario, what was happening with the teachers in Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick. What that really had to do with what we're trying to do in Alberta, and that's maintain an education system and hopefully improve it, an education system that taught the minister to read – and I was very, very pleased to see that he could read those quotes so eloquently.

Mr. Chairman, the minister also referred to Alberta's leadership in the national indicators program. I believe if I reflect back a year or two, I can recall that the only two provinces that were involved in that were Alberta and Quebec. It's a program that is very, very shaky. It doesn't know where it's going. It isn't going to achieve anything very good, and it's going to cost us a lot of money in the process. However, what the minister then chooses to do, he and Quebec – the ministers of Education were on this one pretty well there a couple of years ago. Then he goes and kicks his pal in the shins for other things, accusing Quebec of wanting to get rid of all the school boards.

Now, the budget debates are to do with finance. I haven't had that much time to go through the budget, and I do thank the

minister for giving me this extra day to try to fish through it a little bit more, but I'm becoming very, very concerned when I look at the vision statement, which I felt the budget was going to try to achieve, and then I look at where the budget itself is going. One of the areas that has me concerned is that I believe that the funding for equity grants has been relatively the same, whereas that has been the most crucial financial issue in Alberta for the last three years. Yet there is no adjustment there. At the same time that we're looking at it, we know that the needy school boards are generally the ones that are using distance education and the Alberta resource centre the most. Mr. Chairman, I find it rather strange that the distance ed has been sliced down by the amount that it has in there, and I am sure the minister will have some explanation. The question that I would like to pose directly on that particular topic is: what assurances, not just rhetoric but specific assurances, can the minister give the people who access this particular centre that the service is going to remain at a high enough level? I'm sure he'll have some sort of explanation there.

The other significant increase, I believe, was explained in that the special-needs grant is now going to follow the students regardless of what school system they go into. Although I'm not going to go on on that particular topic very much, I think it's quite appropriate that students with special needs do get the support wherever they should go. I have a very great concern, however, in what is happening in education in Alberta overall with respect to the increasing number of independent schools that are arising. I do appreciate that they are through parent choice, but sometimes they are occurring in areas where they can't be supported. I'm referring to the sparsely populated areas. I think some sort of plan should be put into place that if an independent school is going to be established in the rural area, the effects on the existing system are not detrimental – detrimental to the extent that some of them are suffering under extreme circumstances in southern Alberta.

Now, this leads us into another area. I was hoping to see some initiatives in the budget, and that was in the whole area of, I guess, school board boundaries. I know in private discussion with the minister some time ago we tossed around what the savings of consolidation would be. I won't argue with the figures he presented at that time. However, I think there are other efficiencies besides finances that could come to bear if there was some degree of consolidation of school boards. I'm speaking of situations whereby due to the shifts of population boards have basically become redundant.

11:20

The other area that I was most distressed to see is not being addressed is this whole notion of the creation of new school boards. I would like to ask the minister if either today or at some other time he could provide the House with the number, and names preferably, of new school boards that have been established since 1989. Whatever date: I think January 1 would be sufficient. I'd like to know whether we're going up or down in that particular area.

Still on the topic of school boards, I would strongly recommend to the minister that a mechanism be brought in that school boards which do not operate schools either become viable, school-operating authorities or else they end up going out of existence, because these particular entities do not help education. Again we're referring to the rural areas, but the nonoperating school boards are of no benefit to either the separate system, which they purport to support, or to the public system, into which areas they generally encroach and create problems. So I would like to see Alberta Education at some point very soon start addressing this problem.

Although the minister and I may disagree on many things philosophically, Mr. Chairman, I think that we both have the same mind-set when it comes to getting the best possible education for Alberta's children with the dollars that we have. So any kind of initiatives that he would take that would stretch the current finances further I would be glad to support.

There is one area that I know the minister is aware of but I would hope that someday he would take the opportunity to go one step further. It appears to be a contradiction whereas it's really not, and I'm referring specifically now to the Alberta School for the Deaf. I think that school should be placed on a special status simply because those children there – and I've had the occasion to speak with them – perceive themselves not as special-needs students. I've been informed by the students themselves that when they are integrated into the regular schools is when they become ostracized. They are not really being integrated; they are in fact being segregated by being placed into the regular school setting. I would suggest that the minister take the time to go and talk to these students. I know myself that having corresponded with them in the last year and having sat down and talked to them, I have changed my thinking significantly. I feel very strongly that that school should be supported. It should be supported as a special case whatever jurisdiction it's under. The assurances should be given and should be solidly in place that not only will that school be remaining, but actually the enrollment of deaf students into the school should be encouraged.

The public and separate systems feel when they accept deaf students into the regular schools that all that is needed, really, is an interpreter. This has created another problem, because signing is a language of its own. The students that I spoke with in the School for the Deaf, the ones that had been both in the regular-stream schools and then ended up in the School for the Deaf, told me quite clearly that the qualifications of many of the signers that were assigned to them in the public schools were not up to par. I would want the minister, first of all, on a personal note to hear these people out and, secondly, to perhaps have members of the department have a good look at that particular school without looking towards integrating the students there but leaving it as a school – I guess referring to them as they like to be referred to: as people with a culture all their own.

Furthermore, one step on top of that. I'm not suggesting that the minister all of a sudden find moneys if he doesn't have any, because he doesn't, and I'm not suggesting Alberta Education even enter into financing, but I think some method should be found to take these students who succeed in their school at the high school level and make some effort somehow – whichever way, either through government agencies or even private industry – to let the qualified ones proceed on to deaf universities, which we don't have in this particular locale. I think that would send out a very, very positive signal, and I think it would do an awful lot for that particular community.

I think that what they need now in some way is the assurance that that school is not going to be closed. Whether they have any right to be apprehensive or not I quite frankly don't know, but they are very, very concerned.

The terminology. They don't appreciate being called needy or disabled or whatever. They feel that they are in a culture of their own, and after having met with them and having one of the best experiences of my life with that group of students, I happen to agree with their assessment of their own way.

The whole area of special education. The initiatives are being taken. I know it's a very controversial topic, but I know for sure that we are going too quickly into the integration mode. There is no question in my mind that in some cases integration is the best

way. On a personal note, I was involved as a principal. I personally do agree with having special-needs integration, but I also believe very strongly that the parents of the students in need aren't the only ones who are qualified to make the decision. Very frequently placements are not to the benefit of the student being placed, nor are they to the benefit of the class that they are being placed into.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the minister tabled a paper this morning. I didn't have time to go through it in detail, but I noticed again that it was one of the typical things: we're going to look at the costs, but the costs aren't going to be there anyhow. So I would say: just say no and don't bother researching it, or else research it with an open mind and be prepared to support the real costs of integrating students into systems. What has happened in Alberta in the past: there have been particular areas that have had very good special-needs programs. Grande Prairie is one, Spruce Grove is another, and then there are ones in both Edmonton and Calgary. These have become like magnets to people who have special-needs students. They would gravitate to these communities, and the areas seem to be growing. Now, I really don't know what the answer is to it, but I think when we're looking at the whole area of special-needs students in the province, we have to keep in mind these particular places that have become, if you will, centres for special-needs students.

I do stress again that we should be looking very carefully at how many students, what the students like. We should not discount the fact that some parents don't want their students integrated into the so-called regular stream; some students are better off not being integrated. I know we have full- and part-time programs. I would caution the minister's department that you just don't push this one through. The intent is certainly sound. The process, I think, may not be quite as good as it should be.

I also notice in the money part of this exercise that there is a reduction in the planning and assistance to boards – what that might mean – and I would like the minister to explain the justification for the reduction there.

11:30

MR. DINNING: Where?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: I'm sorry; planning and assistance to boards. I'll give the vote to you later.

The other part that I sort of wondered about is where the minister's vision fits in. There are some aspects of the vision which certainly are very good. The only thing I really have a concern with is that what appears to have happened now is that the vision has become an entity unto itself. It's being pushed and promoted and propagandized beyond any reasonable level, and some parts of it become contradictory. For example, we know the way the two-count system came in. I agree. I believe I'm on record for agreeing with the two-count system on specific programs in specific places, and I'll stand by that. If you have a very specific program that grows in need and then diminishes and the students are gone, you can eliminate it, but to take and apply a two-count system to boards overall is, I would say – the kindest words I can think of in some cases would be cruel and vindictive to the boards.

What is happening here is that boards are expected to be submitting budgets for next September based on grants. They are already guessing to a large extent for what September will bring. They have, I think, very efficient and good guesses in most places, and then they are supposed to guess another one: what is going to happen approximately six months down the road, and trying to anticipate revenue losses there. Now, the minister will say to me:

oh, yes, but of course if they get more students, they'll get more money. Indeed that is true, but he also knows that during the course of the year there are movements that are uncontrolled by boards. There is a placement of students out of school that may be dropouts when they really are not; there is a movement of students into other areas, into other departments which the boards can't control.

The rationale was focusing strictly on the high school students. I am really quite perplexed, and I don't understand how we can get such contradictions in the documents that are provided. We've got this report card on the visions, Achieving the Vision 1991 report, and I'll quote from it because I want to let the minister know that I can read too. On page 17 in table 3, 1979-80, the annual dropout rate for 14 to 18 year olds was 12 percent; the number of students who dropped out was 16,500. In a 10-year period the dropout rate went to 7 and a half percent; the number dropped to 10,000. The minister is saying that we've got a 30 percent dropout rate when he talked about the two-count system in the budget. I would like the minister to explain to me: on what basis are they coming up with figures? When you have a table in the report card that says the dropout rate is 7.5 percent for 14 to 18 year olds, which is roughly the grades 9 to 12 group, and then the budget states that we've got a 30 percent dropout, which document is right? Is the vision true? Because the vision tells me it's 7 and a half percent and we've got a 5 percent improvement over a 10-year period.

Now, I would say that I would attribute that improvement directly to school boards doing a very good job. So what does the minister then do? On page 19 - I will read this one too; I have to read it out - it says:

The Alberta Government is implementing a new two-count system for school boards for 1992-93. School enrollments will be counted in both September and April,

and if the minister feels like it, in June also,

and school boards will receive their grants based on the average of the two counts. This is intended to provide a strong incentive to school boards to keep students in school.

Well, how in the world can they get better than what they already were when on page 17 they improved the thing as much as they did? Either the report on the vision is becoming a hallucination or else somebody is way, way out to lunch.

I would strongly recommend to the minister that he back off his two-count system. I know it might be tricky, but he's sort of a good figure skater and he could get around the issue and let the boards off the hook. I do appreciate that to some degree he has made allowances for students - I believe it is achieving their diplomas or whatnot during the course of the year - and for that concession to the boards I would commend him. I think that was a right and proper decision to make, and I certainly don't have any difficulty in giving him credit for looking at that particular aspect of it.

The minister commended Jasper Place composite high school, Mr. Chairman, for going to West Edmonton Mall. I don't have any problem with that. I think the counsellors there can go and get the dropouts back; they can put classrooms in the mall and the whole business. The question I would ask is: are these students in the mall counted as a part of the Jasper Place composite enrollment, or are we going to have a whole new category of mall students with classrooms? Because surely the next step is going to be that somebody is going to want the costs covered. I don't know enough about the program and I don't think the program has been around long enough to be assessed properly, and on that basis I would suggest that the minister's department go along with the school boards and not do an assessment in terms of what we

always fall under: money, money, money - because with that we end up giving confrontation - but an assessment into how effective that kind of an outreach program is. I would suggest that if that program works in the mall in Edmonton, that kind of model or some change of it could be applied, say, in native communities on their own.

I know, for example - and again this goes back to my personal involvement - that there have been some very sincere and very strong efforts made in the native education area by Alberta Education. I won't criticize the minister for not putting more money into this program because quite frankly I think the program has run into all sorts of logjams that the people operating it are not responsible for. I'm not being the least bit critical. What I would like the minister to keep in mind is that this native education project is a very good one and perhaps the parameters should be expanded, perhaps the involvement of the federal people should be looked at, because I feel that we have now gone beyond being able to sit back in most areas and say that students on the reserve are federal responsibility and students not on the reserve are provincial. I feel very strongly, and I'll go on the record, that native students, treaty Indians, should be paid for by the federal government both off and on the reserve. I mean that quite honestly and sincerely. However, what is happening - it happens in Edmonton for sure, Lethbridge for sure, and to some degree in Calgary - is that we are getting a large movement of students from the reserves into the cities and back out again. What is happening is that they're going between jurisdictions - between governments, if you will - and these children I don't think are being served properly by either side. I think Alberta Education could show the initiative to take after this particular problem and come up with hopefully some solutions.

As I said earlier in my comments, the schools are supposed to be looking after students; Alberta Education is supposed to be looking after these schools. I was a little bit distressed to see that there hasn't been a proper emphasis placed on dealing with the problems that the major centres are facing with respect to the students they are having to deal with. We're getting students who are deprived healthwise or deprived on a nutrition basis or deprived socially and so on. Programs are coming up, and I will not stand here and say we should have Head Start per se, because what we should have is a program or some sort of effort being made to identify and get these students on stream. Whether that becomes a school's responsibility or Alberta Education's responsibility I'm not too sure, because there has to be some point where the age cutoff is going to be. I guess if the mandated age for schools is going to be at six months old, then we'll look at it in that light, but I think that we can't have the cop-out that it's not the mandate.

11:40

I think it's very important that the Department of Family and Social Services work very closely with Education to identify these children and to make sure that programs are brought in for them, programs that will not only reach the ones who have caring parents but programs that will reach the students whose parents will not get involved, for lack of better terminology, in the schools. I think that's really an essential aspect. Along with getting together with Family and Social Services - it's there; it goes all the way up right through until the students become adult - I think they should stretch that involvement a little bit closer and have a much, much closer liaison. There were efforts made, I believe in 1985 or '86, where there was a position paper by the ministers of the day to try and get closer liaison with the schools, and I don't think that ever came to fruition.

The other area that has been lost by the wayside is the responsibilities that have been assumed by Health for speech pathology and the other aspects of it. If the minister checks around the province, I believe in many cases the local health units, again likely due to funding, have not been living up to their obligations.

The minister is aware of what I'm going to say next when I'm referring to health units, and that's the problem that has occurred at a provincially operated school on the Enoch reserve called Kitaskinaw where the health unit has a legal obligation to provide immunization services. The health unit withdrew the service in September. The school is going to continue under provincial jurisdiction, and it hasn't been reinstated. I would again request that the minister do a personal intervention on whatever level he deems necessary to ensure that that service comes back to those students. If there's going to be an argument between levels of government, I would side with the minister on the costing of it, but in the interim to deprive the students of immunization services is totally wrong. It's unacceptable, and I think the minister is in a position where he can honestly say that it has gone on too long and show direct action on a very specific case there. Again I would be more than willing to support him on that, whichever direction he chooses. I'm more interested in the service coming in than getting into a confrontation as to who should pay and who shouldn't pay.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that I may be running out of time soon here, but getting back to native education and the vision, I'd like the minister – and this will likely come at a later time in writing – if he can, to spell out the specific initiatives that are being taken to improve that particular aspect.

I've already asked him for the number of new boards being established, and I believe I've asked him about the student count at the malls. I'm sure he will explain how the counts differ all over the place for dropouts. If he can't explain that, then I don't know what we're going to do with him, because that's certainly one that's got a lot of people confused.

The other explanation that I would like, a very specific one, is what is going to be done with the inequity of the boards. I'm taking about the poor boards. There are groups around with good ideas, and I would like to see some initiative being taken, because it doesn't help . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, your time has expired.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sometimes I feel that the minister and the two critics should just get together and discuss these issues for half a day and get it over with, because it seems that the process we're now involved in is not of that much interest to other members. I'm not sure that people listen to what I believe is very, very critical. I am totally committed to education and enjoying very much my position as critic.

I would like to say that I believe, along with the minister and his deputy and his assistant deputy, that education in Alberta is definitely the best in Canada and certainly in North America. However, the vision which the minister has is certainly not my vision. He seems to be leaning towards seeing students as economic units, as people to be developed in order to improve the marketplace. That's not at all how I see individual students. I think that each and every student must be seen as an individual with dignity, dignity that must be respected and must be encouraged. The problem also with the minister's vision is that it is somewhat hollow, because many of the items which the minister brought out and mentioned in the vision paper are certainly nothing new to people who've been involved in education for a

long time. We all know what the problems are, what the concerns are. What is lacking in the vision paper is a solution to so many of these problems. Another thing that I miss from the vision paper is the commitment to the education of the whole child, the formation of the entire person. I think that is an extremely important philosophy that I would like to see followed by this government.

However, I know that education is being focused on as never before. It's become an economic imperative. Everyone is looking at education. It's also become politicized. There are people who are taking opposite views. There's polarization. That's unfortunate; we should be working together. I see that, however, as a result of the crisis we have in this province and across the country in trying to balance budgets.

Before I go into the actual votes, I'd like to make some general statements in addition to those I've already made. I do believe that the budget shows that there are some critical issues which are not being addressed, and I agree with the minister that we don't necessarily have to spend more but we have to spend smarter. I think we can repriorize some of the current ways in which we do things. There are some structural problems, probably, that could be addressed so that high-priority needs are met. I know one of the things that school boards – especially, for instance, the Calgary public school board – are asking for is the two- or three-year operating budget so that they know ahead of time what it is that they'll be getting so that they can plan. This is the type of efficiency which in the long run would certainly save money and would allow people to go without that annual agony of how much are we going to get and then having to wait to set the budget not knowing exactly how much they're going to get.

Another funding problem is the one of inequity. I know the minister is trying hard to resolve this; however, it looks to me as if unless he gets his way, which is corporate pooling, he's not going to make a hard decision. I don't think corporate pooling is going to fly. As far as I know, having talked to a number of people, there are no plans at the moment to solve the problem of inequity, and the problem just gets worse as every year goes by.

I didn't see any funding which was anywhere near adequate for ESL. Again I think funding there has a sleeper effect. What we spend now on children who need much better education in the English language will certainly save us money later on.

There was no funding mentioned for natives over 19 years of age who wish to remain in the familiar surroundings of the native cultural schools. I think again that is something that would provide a sleeper effect; it's efficient in the long run.

I did not see anything in the budget about the minister moving the required legislation for the establishment of French school boards where desired by French parents. I know it probably was in the Speech from the Throne but not in any detail, so we had to guess what the minister meant to do when he said he would amend the School Act.

I do believe that curriculum changes must never be made without consultation with the major players, and the math 30 of the past year is certainly an example of that. Testing was done before the program had been completely implemented. All of the schools, I think especially the French schools, had not received the resources they needed in order to prepare their students to write this math 30 test. So while I agree that curriculum must remain current, I'm also saying that teachers must be involved and that in-service and resources must be provided in order to make sure the changes are actually of a positive nature in the long run.

11:50

The area of capital funding seems to have been addressed. Again, though, I think there has to be prioritization and better

planning. I look at the number of new schools announced for the Kanaskis area. Wonderful; they need new schools. However, then I look at Lac La Biche – I see the member is in the Chamber – and I hear that there are still mice in the school at Lac La Biche, that the plumbing is still falling apart. So while we plan new schools, we are not looking after the needs of those schools that still need renovation, that need upgrading.

Unlike the member from the other opposition party I do believe in Head Start programs, especially for the inner-city areas. Again there's a sleeper effect. If students are well fed, if they are identified as to who is at risk and so on, I think the benefit in the long run is of extreme importance. I really believe we should emphasize the early grades in any case and that most of our money should be spent in those earlier years when the creativity and the enthusiasm of students is at its highest level. I would like to get rid of the grade 3 achievement tests. They are not telling us anything, and that money could better be spent on creating smaller classes in the K to 3 level. Even the Chamber of Resources said that we should have smaller classes, and that is one of their recommendations that I would highly support.

I think there has to be amalgamation of some of the school boards and maybe an incentive for this to occur. I look at the Lakeland school division and the Lakeland Catholic school district. That is a model of amalgamation. Seven or eight small school boards came together to create one division – one separate, one public – where resources could be pooled, transportation could be pooled. It's an excellent model, and I would like to see an incentive for many, many more school boards in this province to follow that model.

AN HON. MEMBER: They did it on their own?

MRS. GAGNON: I'm sure they received some type of encouragement, at least, and some leadership which I think is missing by this minister.

Also, Mr. Chairman, I think the minister has a fixation with testing and not on the development of students. The testing program which he has announced – results, results, results – I think is meant more to fulfill his needs than the needs of our students.

I am happy to hear the minister talk about intergovernmental services being improved. I think that whole idea of co-operation, co-ordination of services is absolutely a must. I know the Calgary school board is talking about a high increase in the number of children with behaviour disorders, in the number of multiply physically and mentally handicapped children who must be integrated to a certain level. The boards welcome these children, but they would like to pay for educational costs and let other departments pay for the other services which are needed by these children.

Mr. Chairman, I have two more general comments before I get to the votes. I think the two-count system for payment to school boards, if it is meant as an incentive to stem the dropout rate, will absolutely not work. For many school boards this is punitive. It becomes a negative factor, and they will actually get no increase with the two-count system. I know that I asked the minister last year for a two-count system for English as a Second Language students only, looking at the increase throughout the year. I remember the minister saying: well, would it work both ways? I haven't reviewed *Hansard*, but I think I said yes, as long as other factors are taken into account. I certainly did not talk about anything else but ESL, and I think everyone was appalled, surprised – and there should be no surprises in a co-operative venture like education – when the minister said that the two-count

system would apply to every single program, to the entire system. It's going to be counterproductive in the long run. We all know the dropout rate is not as high as some are saying it is – in actual fact I think it's 17 percent – but if you penalize those very boards who need money to provide preventative programs, programs which will stem the dropout rate, this is certainly not how it's going to be done.

Another general comment I'd like to make is that the thrust seems to be to develop a new student information system to track and assess student performance more accurately. Again I repeat: I think the overemphasis on testing is meant to meet the minister's needs more than the students' needs. Actually, I and my caucus have no problem with testing. Testing is an absolute must because we have to assure achievement and competence. However, we must not emphasize it, and we must assure that the costs of testing are not so great that they take away from the actual teaching of students.

Now I'd like to get to the actual votes. Under vote 1 – and I'm going to take a cheap shot, but many are often taken at me – there has been an increase of 4.9 percent in the minister's office. My comment on this is that coupled with the living allowance, this would probably solve the Assumption school's problem for a couple of years. Information Services, vote 1.0.10, has increased by 34.8 percent. Is this money what was spent on the cost of printing and trying to sell the vision statement? I'd like to know that.

In 1.0.13, Policy and Planning, there's been a decrease by 8.6 percent. How can the serious problems in education be resolved if there is no thought put into it, if there is decrease in planning? Planning is what creates efficiency down the road, and I think it's unfortunate that we've seen such a really huge cut in this area of planning and policy.

Item 1.0.14: an increase of 13.6 percent. I'd like to ask the minister why.

In vote 1 there's the purchase of capital assets totaling \$500,000. I'd like to know what that money went for.

Under Financial Assistance to Schools, 2.2.1, there's a reduction of .7 percent. It's not that high, but it also is a signal of downloading on an already overburdened taxpayer. How is this going to assist schools in solving the problem of offering quality education to all of their students, and how is it going to help school boards to settle labour disputes which they have with their unions?

Under 2.2.3, Student Program Grants, we see a reduction of 1.2 percent. I think this will harm the have-not jurisdictions who don't have flexibility in curriculum that other jurisdictions have. My comments as regards 2.2.3 are the same as those stated above.

I see an increase of funding to private schools by 6.1 percent in the area of special ed, and I think this is good. This is fairness. Many have asked for this, and I think all children should be treated in a fair and equitable manner.

When I look at vote 3, Development and Delivery of Education Programs: 3.1.1, an increase of 3.7 percent; 3.1.2, an increase of 4 percent. These two votes deal with the evaluation of students and their respective programs. Clearly these votes were increased as a result of the minister's fixation – and I call it a fixation – with testing and with comparisons with other countries. I'm not sure that in the long run this is going to be productive. As I said earlier, I have no problem with testing; I think national standards must be established. I commend the minister for the leadership shown there, because people are mobile; they want to move across the country and know that their students will be able to access a similar education with similar standards. However, I do believe we are overemphasizing this, and when I see that kind of increase

on that side and less increase in long-term planning and in funding for have-not school boards, I get a little worried.

12:00

Under 3.1.3, a decrease in the curriculum budget by .6 percent is a small decrease, but I think again it's a trend. It shows a lessening as far as development. We know that curriculum must be updated constantly. The world changes extremely quickly, and students must be very current in the kinds of material they are learning. I have always maintained that we should have an independent board to evaluate curriculum. Maybe we should go back to that Curriculum Policies Board which was in existence until the early '80s. I know there were problems with it, but I do think it gave everyone a sense of ownership. As I said earlier, I think teachers must be involved in all curriculum changes. Unless they have ownership, they cannot implement curriculum in a proper manner.

Under 3.1.6, I see a decrease of 10.6 percent in Distance Education. I think this is counterproductive. It may have to do with the fact that our rural areas are suffering from depopulation. However, I think the technology we have access to, if well used and properly funded, would help small communities stay alive, would help maintain rural schools, especially rural high schools. So I'm quite alarmed when I see a 10.6 percent decrease in Distance Education, and I would like an explanation of that from the minister. I'm also concerned about 3.1.7, which is basically the same. I see a decrease there of 5.1 percent in the Alberta Distance Learning Centre budget. Also, 3.2, Regional Services, cut by .5 percent. I'm concerned that there the government seems to be renegeing on a commitment to the continuing education of its citizens and continued service to at-risk students and so on.

Under Native Education, 1 percent is certainly not enough; again, a sleeper effect. Sometimes we have to spend money in order to achieve more productivity, more competence, a higher level of citizenship, really. I don't see that happening here, where there's a great need. There are improvements in the area of native education but certainly not to the degree there could be. I know there are some jurisdictional problems, which are constantly being worked out, but many, many native students are actually the responsibility of the province. They live in urban areas, and we must make sure their needs are addressed.

I would like to go back just for a minute to another question I had. This dealt with federal government funding of bilingualism. I note that in 1990 Alberta received \$450,000 and in 1991 it received only \$29,000. I'm sure it's because a new protocol agreement hadn't been signed or something like that, but I think we need an explanation. That is an awful lot of money.

Mr. Chairman, with those comments, I would like to move a motion. I have copies for circulation. The motion has already been approved by the Speaker. I will wait until copies have been distributed before I move my motion.

I'd like to propose the following motion to the Committee of Supply.

Be it resolved that the Committee of Supply recommend to the Assembly that upon the request of any three members the Committee of Supply order a warrant summoning the Deputy Minister of Education or any employee of the department it considers necessary to consider the estimates of the department and that the deputy minister or employee provide complete documentation regarding program description or comparative estimates as requested by any member.

Mr. Chairman, the exercise we went through last night with Advanced Education was simply an exercise in futility. We don't have enough detail to comment on the budget estimates. Billions of dollars are passed in two and a half hours and there's really no

detail. It's a farce. A few people get up and say a few things. I think the whole process is extremely flawed, and Albertans are tired of it. It's because of that that I move this motion, and I would now ask that members debate the motion under consideration.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to support the motion of my colleague from Calgary-McKnight. As you can tell from the sound of my voice, I won't be speaking very long, which will probably give you great joy, but I find it important to make a few comments with respect to this process.

The Member for Calgary-McKnight has highlighted a problem with the budget process that we have identified for some time wherein questions are asked of a minister and the minister may or may not answer some or all – perhaps none – of the questions posed. There is difficulty obtaining details about programs and places and numbers of people served by programs and so forth. In effect, when you look at the budget, regardless of the department, Mr. Chairman, you see that the estimates this year are in much the same format as they were in previous years. What we see is an actual expenditure from two years ago, last year's estimate, and the forecast on this year's estimate. So what we're looking at are very similar kinds of information which, unfortunately, are not sufficient for us to really debate and discuss the details being proposed before us. What we're talking about is a \$12 billion budget.

I think the Department of Education, with due respect to the minister, is probably one of the most important departments in this government, and certainly – and I know this from personal experience – is one of the reasons I ventured into politics in the first place. So I support the minister from the standpoint of wanting the best education system in the province. I agree with him 110 percent.

The reason I'm supporting this motion from my colleague from Calgary-McKnight is that the minister made some comments about an incident that I know very well. He mentioned Chuck Rose as a principal at Ernest Morrow junior high school. Mr. Chairman, I had the opportunity to teach in that very school and had the opportunity to work for that very principal, so I know both the situation and the principal to whom he refers. I know that great strides and great changes can be made without an increase in dollar expenditures, and I think that's a very valuable point. Unfortunately, we don't see that before us today, we don't see all that background information, and therein lies the problem. We haven't had all the information that I know the minister must have and certainly has had at his disposal. I applaud those kinds of moves. If we can deliver a better education product to our students and make them better prepared without costing more money and perhaps costing even less money, I think those are the kinds of things we should be discussing. Unfortunately, we don't have the opportunity to do that here in this Legislature because the information simply isn't forthcoming.

My colleague mentioned curriculum changes. Well, there may be curriculum changes in the works. I well recall having the experience of a new science curriculum coming in and ordering textbooks in June only to have them arrive in September of that year, Mr. Chairman; finding that the books we'd ordered in June had suddenly changed and those weren't the right books to order. I think the planning and direction that sometimes is given even to front-line teachers is sorely lacking; it's from that standpoint. If we open up the budget process and ask the minister to arrive with

deputy ministers, curriculum developers, instructional developers, perhaps even professors from the university, who can give us some background on where we need to go in the future and how we can modify and improve and develop and make our education system better, I think those can be improved through the budget process. For those reasons, Mr. Chairman, I support the motion of my hon. colleague from Calgary-McKnight.

Thank you.

12:10

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to speak in opposition to the motion. I've been in this Legislature quite a number of years now, and I've seen a change in the way estimates are handled. I was in this Legislature when there were six members in the opposition. I've seen ministers come into this Legislature with binders of information. I look over at the Minister of Education's desk. He's got a binder there, probably three inches thick, with information that he hasn't had to open because we've heard long speeches of philosophy. The hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight asked two or three questions and then rambled into philosophy again. I can remember seeing the hon. Grant Notley standing here with a page in front of him. He'd ask about 10 questions and sit down, the minister would respond, and he would have 10 more ready. It maybe took him five minutes to do it. The estimates went on all night.

If you want information, ask some questions. Ask some direct questions and then you will get information. If we want to get into discussions of philosophy, we need more time; we could go on for 365 days. But if you want information, ask some questions. We don't need to demand that somebody come in front of us. Let's just sit down and ask some questions. If it's important, where is the support in the Liberal caucus? Two members, 25 percent of the caucus, are in the Legislature. If you want information, ask questions. Get up and spend five minutes asking questions, sit down, and be ready with five more. The minister would answer, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have some concerns about this process as well. The time available for estimates study in this Legislature is precious enough without our having to debate whether or not a warrant should be issued for the deputy minister. I'm not certain the deputy's done anything that merits the issuance of a warrant. I would say that if the Liberals want to reform this process, it is time they brought in a substantive motion under notice giving their views on how this estimates process should work. I'm a little tired of them trying to prevent the rest of us from asking questions such as this one question I'd like to ask the Minister of Education, which is . . .

MRS. GAGNON: Stick to the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further comments? Is the committee ready for the question?

[Motion lost]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Ponoka-Rimbey.

MR. JONSON: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to start my remarks by asking two specific questions with respect to the

votes. First of all, with respect to vote 1, the matter of Information Services and so forth has been touched upon already, but in terms of the full-time equivalent staffing reductions proposed there, I'm not in any way objecting to these. I think they are necessary in view of the overall financial situation. However, I would like to know exactly what areas of department operations those full-time equivalent reductions will affect. In the case of vote 1, it's minus 6.6 percent in terms of expenditure in that area and a certain number of positions being reduced. The impact that will have in terms of services from the department should be available to the Assembly.

The other specific question I have from the estimates, Mr. Chairman, deals with vote 2.1, Provincial Contribution to the School Foundation Program Fund. Of course that flows through to the instructional grants per student. It's projected to increase by 5.4 percent. Now, an overall grant increase of 3 percent has been announced. I understand the projected student growth in the province is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 5 percent. The 5.4 percent increase doesn't quite jibe in terms of my understanding of these things unless – and I hope this is not the case – the budget has already assumed a certain dropout rate under the two-count system in Alberta schools. I would like that whole matter clarified, as to how the 5.4 percent increase was arrived at.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make some general comments and raise some questions with respect to the overall program of the department. Certainly I would like to start out by stating that I support the idea of a vision statement. There is nothing wrong with that, and certainly it's a healthy thing for any government program or any activity to talk about goals and performance and have a debate thereon. Comparisons should be made. We should know where we stand relative to other educational systems, and there's certainly the need to discuss the priorities of education in this province. In a time of difficult financial circumstances and the need to put as much priority as possible on education, we need to talk about priorities within the system and make some decisions in that regard.

With respect to the vision statement, though, and some things that have happened since it was issued, I'd like to make two or three or four or five points. First of all, the minister is reporting and commenting on various studies and comparisons, and there is statistical information in terms of percentage in science in one country versus another. I think that is fine, but I feel that should be presented in the context of at least a brief description for the public of this province of the educational systems that exist in the countries we are being compared with.

For instance, in country A students are streamed. Many are taken out of what might be called the academic stream of education by the age of 12 or 14, yet some of the test results that have been reported deal with 16-year-olds. In our system, the whole cohort of students is still in the system at that time, and you can expect there might be better performances in a country which has channeled off a certain number of students compared to one in which we're dealing with a more general education for all students across the province. I think if we're going to get into the business of using comparative statistics, we should be providing a bit more information. I wonder if there is any plan to do that during this year by the minister and his department.

The criticism of the vision statement that I have heard, Mr. Chairman, is that while it certainly is very strong on a results/performance base system, it still goes on to cover the waterfront in terms of the responsibilities being laid upon the school system and expected to be met by the people operating it. One of the themes I think we hear at meetings across the province dealing with education these days is that given that so much more

is being expected of the schools, not necessarily by design but often just by circumstances their mandate is being expanded. Certainly there needs to be co-ordination among government departments and in the programs they deliver.

I would like to ask the minister what plan or what progress, or if not any progress, at least what concrete, meaningful plan is going to be in place to try and bring about this co-ordination. Everybody agrees that it's necessary. It's a great thing until you get down to doing it, and it seems various turf wars erupt among departments or there is some great difficulty in sharing budgets, and those particular services are not very well co-ordinated across the province. I realize there are some specific communities and schools that are doing a good job in this regard. Perhaps at the very least we should be making an effort to publicize and spread the good word as to some of the success stories in the province with respect to this co-ordinated effort.

The vision statement, Mr. Chairman, deals with special education policy. Today the minister tabled a discussion paper with respect to this policy, and I'm glad to see that is going out for public response. I hope there is a large response to this particular policy document and it is responded to in a frank and realistic manner, but I do have one little question about the nature of the questionnaire. If I could compare it with the economic department's *Toward 2000* paper, a very detailed questionnaire went out. We were proud of the fact that there were thousands of them coming back, and they were coming back from the citizens of Alberta. This particular discussion paper has a curious feature, and that is that it requires detailed identification of the person responding to the paper. I would like to ask the minister what the purpose of that particular section of the questionnaire is, whether these responses are going to be categorized and reported in that regard – you know, the teacher said this and those under 16 said that and those over 50 said something else – and perhaps some weighting is going to be given to different responses. I don't know, but I'm just a bit curious about that particular aspect of the questionnaire.

12:20

Also, since the matter of student retention is a very important issue across the country these days, I would like to ask the minister what the relationship, the connection, if any, is between the federal stay-in-school initiative, which is under way right now, and the work of his department. Is there any sharing of expertise, any co-ordination of effort in this regard, any flow of funds one way or the other, hopefully to us? What is going on with respect to that overall activity?

I'd like to also comment on the stay-in-school initiative and the whole issue of student retention from the point of view, yes, of the two-count system. I commend the minister for raising the issue of student retention and making it a matter that has to be discussed, and something must be done about it. However, I suggest that the way this whole thing might be approached would be to make sure we have accurate data – and I think that's been raised already here this morning – as to what constitutes the unacceptable dropout rate. There's nothing a school should be ashamed about if a student goes to the grade 11 level successfully and then leaves school after due consideration to take up an apprenticeship. That's not a negative type of school-leaving situation, and I could go on with many, many other examples. Certainly there's a significant number of students who leave our school system that should be helped to stay there. We should start this whole matter from an accurate base of information, and we should be talking about putting plans into effect and so forth and then, yes, if there has to be the two-count system to provide some financial incentive to

make greater effort, that might be a further consideration. I think school boards across the province feel this has been dropped upon them rather suddenly.

The other thing I would like to point out – and this leads me to another topic I'd like to comment on briefly – is the whole matter of equity funding for education. Mr. Chairman, this morning one of the previous speakers used the example of the Lac La Biche school division. The school division is not, of course, as familiar to me as to the hon. Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, but I do know that part of the province rather well. I expect this two-count system constitutes a double whammy for the Lac La Biche school division. They have various employment issues, various school funding issues and needs that they're already facing. They would acknowledge that they have quite a high dropout rate. I'm sure they're doing all they can within their resources to try and address it, but now this particular factor in the grant program will reduce the 3 percent further and, I think, just heighten their difficulties.

With respect to the whole matter of equity financing, Mr. Chairman, I recognize there is no magic solution, but hopefully there may be a willingness on the part of various proponents on one side or other of the issue to go forward with an interim solution to at least address in part this whole area of equity financing. I would like him to comment on the stage this is at and what he anticipates happening in the near future, hopefully, with respect to some funding change which will address this whole matter of the differing financial capacities of school boards and school jurisdictions across the province.

I'd also like to raise questions regarding the status of four or five other matters. I know there's been discussion regarding diploma requirements for high school graduation, and I would like to know the status of that particular discussion. What is happening there and what is being proposed? I personally am on record, Mr. Chairman, saying there should be a single diploma with specialization, certainly with an emphasis on excellence. I wonder if anyone is agreeing with my particular point of view on this subject and what is happening with respect to this matter, because it certainly needs to be dealt with.

I also understand, Mr. Chairman, that some time ago a committee was formed to deal with the whole issue of the sexuality education program in our schools. I would like ask as to the status of that particular item.

With respect to distance education, I imagine there is some reasonable rationale as to the fairly significant percentage decrease in funding for that program. But I would like to ask the question: what is the status of this particular initiative with respect to its coverage of the core curriculum of the province? Do we have distance education courses available from 12 down to, hopefully, grade 1? To what extent has this particular set of courses offered through distance education been developed, and in how many places is it now being accessed?

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to switch over to one other matter, and that is one that has been the subject of various petitions and a certain number of questions in the Assembly this spring. I believe it has been announced that discussions among officials are taking place with respect to the Teachers' Retirement Fund issue. I wonder if any progress can be reported in that regard or if the minister would care to speculate on when this whole matter might come to the point where there would be some overall policy decisions and, hopefully, agreements reached.

Those are my questions, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief, because I know there are other members interested in entering the debate. My question is about partnership arrangements in education. I would like to congratulate the business community and the trade union movement and others who are taking a much greater interest in education in this day and age. I think in particular the business community recognizes the quality of graduates they get. That says an awful lot about their ability to do business and compete in the future, and I think it's a wonderful thing that they're becoming involved.

There's a specific question I have, though, about the development of curricular materials by groups outside the education system. It seems we're seeing more and more of organizations and enterprises creating curricular materials for use in the schools. I assume part of the reason for that is that the explosion of knowledge in such and fields of study are such that it's very difficult for staff in the Department of Education to stay on top of those things and create current materials on an ongoing basis, which may be a funding problem. But you know, there are always two sides to every coin. There's a very definite, positive contribution these enterprises can make.

12:30

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

It seems to me there's also the possibility that some groups and some individuals may have a political or philosophical agenda they would like to put in the classroom. They would like to try to get children at a young age to see the world from a certain point of view, to make certain assumptions which, in reality, are political assumptions and certainly are subject to debate. In particular, at the moment the Alberta Forestry Association is preparing curriculum materials dealing with forestry issues which other branches of the government are involved in. I want to know from the minister how he views this general process of outside groups preparing curriculum, what type of review process he thinks is suitable to vet those materials and see that they are in the educational interests of a child as opposed to the private interests of the organization or individual creating the materials. I think it's a very important question, and I'd appreciate his thoughts on that.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Bow.

MRS. B. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to congratulate the minister for helping to keep education high on the priority list for the government. The 3 percent increase in the basic grants have continued the maintenance of the resources that are needed to support the schools throughout the province during these times of difficult fiscal restraint.

I'd like to comment on some of the initiatives that have been put into place by the minister. The Excellence in Teaching Award I think deserves an award of excellence itself. This recognition of teachers and the job they do is well received by the public, the parents, and the teachers. I attended two of the ceremonies myself, and the calibre of the teachers receiving the award was extremely high. The teachers were very thrilled and very touched by this recognition given their efforts.

The Calgary public school board appreciated the five-year capital plan that was given for school buildings and renovations. This plan has allowed the board to set in motion their priorities over a longer time span. One of the requests, though, that I did receive from them was that the Calgary school board would like to see a five-year operational plan, perhaps a basic percentage they could count on for each of the five years and maybe a top-up when the final budget figures come down. I'm sure we all realize

how difficult it is to predict revenue these days, but perhaps some consideration could be given to a form of determining some type of future grant that they could count on.

The equity problem continues to be worked on. It's a very complex issue, and there are very few easy answers. I think all the groups involved realize the difficulty of finding solutions and appreciate the way the minister has opened his office and his door and listened to all the proposals from the various groups. Boundary review is part of this equity challenge, and it's an issue that also needs discussion and investigation. I have Motion 245 on the Order Paper, which hopefully will invite some of this debate if it comes up during this session.

I would commend the minister also for the report card which opened the whole education system for review by all the stakeholders. This report card I felt was a very well balanced overview of the system, showing not just the strength but also some of the areas that we have to work on to improve.

I was very pleased to see the RAP, or the registered apprenticeship program, being started in high schools. Not every child needs to attend university, and the vocational field is a very necessary part to all of society. Giving students the opportunity for a choice of career is an excellent move. The students graduate with field experience as a registered apprentice. The vocational trades I know make a very important contribution to all of society, and it's time that we see the career status for the vocational trades enhanced.

The growth of co-operative education is also an excellent trend. The interest and involvement of business in the schools set models for the children. This program gives children the opportunity to see the value of their education. They see the real world and how the skills that they're learning are used. Spending a few hours in the business office often reinforces for students the need for the good skills that they must develop.

Some of the concerns I have are still with the testing of the grade 3 students. I feel that testing this age group is still unnecessary and often leads to very inaccurate results.

I would encourage the minister to investigate some form of partnership for special schools such as the PICS School in Calgary, which is the Plains Indian Cultural Survival School. Many of these native students are over the age of 19 years and, therefore, will not be funded by the Calgary public school board next year. This program has a very strong cultural basis and is often responsible for a real turnaround in people's lives. Many of the PICS graduates go on to professional careers, and perhaps a partnership between Alberta Ed, Advanced Education, and the federal government could be developed to address the special circumstances of schools such as PICS.

Another area of concern is the ESL funding. There's a real need for additional funds in this area, especially in the major cities. I still feel that the federal government has a role to play in assisting the funding of these ESL children as part of the settlement and support of new immigrants.

On the subject of integration, it's very important, I think, that integrating takes place with the resources and staff needed for the special education students in place. Teachers are not nurses or medical practitioners, and the placement of medically fragile students in the classroom is a real concern. Teachers would feel more confident about the integration policy if they had assurances that the necessary resources are in place. I also believe that some of the costs for special education are rightfully the responsibility of the departments of Health or Family and Social Services, with a charge-back to these departments put in place to ensure that Education funds go to education.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a very brief question I'd like to put to the minister, in particular dealing with vote 2. I note that the student instruction grants have gone up by 5.9 percent. I think that's an appropriate focus, and that's where the focus of the Department of Education should be.

I have a couple of questions, and I don't know; the minister might not have the information with him right at his fingertips. The amount here is almost a billion dollars. I am concerned, and this concern stems from my experiences in the classroom. I'd like to ensure that as much of that billion dollars plus that is going to student instruction actually gets expended on student instruction. My concern here that I want to express to the minister is this: I'm wondering how much of that money goes to administrative costs in terms of central office, in terms of school board trustees, in terms of in-school administration – principals, vice-principals, co-ordinators, curriculum leaders, department heads, and so forth. I think that is really the crux of the entire Education department. All the rest of it, as far as I'm concerned, in a sense is window dressing. We have to make sure that the dollars we are expending on education actually get delivered to the student in the classroom.

Along that line, tied to student instruction grants, ensuring that we get the smallest classes possible, the most favourable pupil/teacher ratio as possible in the province, I'm also wondering how much of that money gets spent on curriculum development in terms of developing new curriculum for teachers, to implement new curriculum; for example, the social studies curriculum. Because of the nature of the world, social studies changes on an almost daily basis. How much of that is being expended for curriculum development and also to assist in-servicing teachers to become more knowledgeable in delivering the most current educational service to the students that they can? That's really what it's all about.

Mr. Chairman, when we look at everything else in the department, really this is where the primary focus has to be, and I'm wondering if the minister could just make a few comments. Really, what I'm asking is what he is doing to ensure that the majority of the dollars are really getting into the classroom for our students.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Just a few comments under vote 2.2.1, looking at the Equity Grants. I don't have to tell the minister what a major issue this is. I'd just like to highlight again the needs, certainly in Red Deer and the Red Deer district, as we're looking at how we in Red Deer are affected, looking at the need for proper equity and some kind of system in the province that is going to recognize that some jurisdictions, like Red Deer's, are suffering and need a fair look at this.

I don't know if time is going to allow the minister to make comments on some of the specifics there, but the power equalization proposal from Red Deer is certainly one that is deserving of a solid look. I'm glad that the proposal and some of the specific numbers that we've sent from Red Deer to the minister and his officials – Superintendent Dave Blacker and our chairman of the board, Barb Hopfner, and others have gone over and worked on these numbers with a lot of diligence and care, and we really feel we've got a very significant proposal there. I know that at our request the minister did organize a meeting of proponents of various proposals. That was very helpful for the MLAs and also for the people with different proposals because it gave them an

opportunity to see what some of the pros and cons are of even their own particular proposal, looking at them in the light of what other people were observing. So I'm asking if either today or at some time the minister can give some direct response back on the power equalization proposal coming from Red Deer and the possibilities of that, or something that's going to achieve the same goal, actually being enacted.

12:40

I appreciate the fact that around the province there are very strong feelings on this particular issue. It's interesting to note that MLAs trying to be responsive to their own boards and to their ratepayers therefore have different views on the situation. One MLA will have a strong view on one side of the issue, another MLA a strong view, obviously, on the other side of the issue. It's a challenge because we're all representing Albertans. We have large groups of Albertans from one area of the province saying one thing and a large area saying another. The MLAs reflect that, and I think that's seen on all sides of the House. I think I'm sensing a concerted desire and effort, certainly from Red Deer's part and from around the province, to see some solution arrived at.

Along those lines, Mr. Minister, can you give some reply today or as soon as possible in the future? If we don't go with what would be seen as a permanent or a long-term solution to the problem – Red Deer district and others are facing significant financial difficulties right now. Therefore, can an interim or, for lack of a better word, a stopgap measure of sorts be adopted to at least alleviate the immediate problems being shouldered by some of the boards? I think we could state clearly that this would be interim, that it's not just a band-aid that's going to continue to be reapplied but in fact some sort of interim proposal that will carry us through the difficult time of sorting out what would be the best long-term adjustment. If the minister could respond to that, that would be appreciated.

On the teachers' pension side of things, at the risk of sounding biased about Red Deer – heaven forbid that I should try and make Red Deer sound like it's a wonderful place, which it is. I am biased in favour of Red Deer, in favour of the teachers there, because I think that over this period of time in the last few months with the request along the lines of funding and the pension plan issue for teachers, they've demonstrated, I believe, what a co-operative model can do. Mr. Somerville, representing them and bringing their concerns to me very clearly, has been a very helpful liaison there. Further to that, meeting with each group of teachers in each school allowed me the opportunity to see very clearly their perspective, their feelings on the issue. It showed me once again and was a reminder that a co-operative model is always the best way to go. Drawing a line and slamming the door and not talking on either side of an issue usually doesn't accomplish a whole lot. Certainly I was educated by the process in Red Deer of talking to the teachers as well as talking to my own colleagues and also officials who were involved in the negotiations back in September and now in the ongoing negotiations. Getting everybody's input together was very helpful for me, and I want to thank the minister for responding to the request to move along in terms of getting the discussions going and hopefully moving towards a resolution there.

In the area of funding of community schools and community education, I'm fully aware that many schools that aren't actually classified as community schools truly do the work of community schools. I recognize that, I acknowledge that, and that's appreciated. It's also important to remember that there are community schools that are designated as such, and with the small amount of dollars, really, that they have under their designation, they are able to do very significant things. That is seen so clearly in Red

Deer with our community schools that we have there. I just want to remind the minister of that. I know that he is sensitive to that issue; I'm familiar with the budgetary restraints. But for those schools that are doing that job, designated as such, please keep that paramount in your sights in terms of recognizing where significant work is done. And the use of volunteers has involved a minimum expenditure of funds. The volunteers are then pulled into making those schools a true benefit to the entire community. It's very significant, and let's keep on that positive track.

The funding for independent schools, of course, is an ongoing concern and ongoing consideration. If people can put aside some of the emotional aspects of the particular argument, which is an argument in some people's minds, and think primarily of the students – thank you for that prompting from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East – it's very important to consider and to remember that it's the children we're talking about. We have to realize, too, that we're in a different era. We're in a different day. The so-called independent school of the past, having that image of being strictly upper crust, elitist, and only allowing membership by a few people in the province, has passed the boards. The vast majority of independent schools that are in place today are schools which take in all students. Their economic profiles show that the majority of supporters of independent schools are from middle-class to low-income families. In fact, the majority are not the upper level in terms of income. They have the same mandate in some areas as public schools do. They do take all students that they possibly can. The image of the independent school only taking the so-called cream of the crop is also something that has long since passed. Public schools, separate schools, and independent schools have on their files significant records of taking students from other school systems where it just wasn't working out for them and in fact helping them to become successful students. I think the Choices for Children campaign is one that's been responsibly presented, and we should look at it in an unemotional and unbiased way and on its merits, which are considerable. If the minister could give some response to that, that would be very much appreciated.

Also, in terms of curriculum development we're hearing from teachers that they are very concerned about new curriculum and the time and cost in terms of in-service in those particular areas. If we as a government are bringing out new curriculum requirements, new programs, we have to acknowledge the time for in-service training and the costs thereof, if we could take a look at that.

I realize the time is rapidly depleting, and the minister seems to want to say a thing or two. The area of apprenticeship training is one which I constantly hear about from my small-business community in Red Deer in terms of allowing students a greater possibility, even than they have now, of building credits on the apprenticeship side while they're still in high school. Looking at the European model in this area, in some cases a significant move towards apprenticeship and eventual journeyman status can be achieved in more aggressive ways. I know it's being looked at in some degree now in the school system, but if that could be looked at in a more aggressive way and if I could have some response on that, I'd appreciate the minister's attendance to some of these questions.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Chairman, there have been several very good questions by members from both sides of the House, and I will do my best to respond to some of them and, of course, respond in more detail in writing to the others.

I'm inclined to just make some brief comments about what the Member for Stony Plain had to say, especially about the school achievement indicators project. There are no longer two provinces involved in this worthy project; there are 10. Count them, one to 10 provinces involved in the project. We are going full speed ahead in trying to develop a set of standards for arithmetic and reading and writing in this country, and we will measure how well our school systems achieve that standard, above or below, and that will provide us with better information in the long term to improve the quality of education in the province.

12:50

A number of comments today from members about private schools. I think the bottom line is that there is concern as to the erosion of the public system in that kids are going and parents are making the choice to send their children off to private schools, independent schools. I acknowledge that; I share the concern. But I say to trustees and I say to hon. members opposite that if we would see school boards focusing more on why students and parents feel they must leave the public system to go to the private system – go back to the source, go back to the reasons why, rather than complaining about providing funding to those private schools – the public system would address the source of the problem. That would be a better way to raise the issue and, frankly, to tackle it. Frankly, I think there's a role to be played for the independent school system, and as the hon. Member for Red Deer-North began to allude to before he sat down, we have responded by announcing today that we are going to deliver for the '92-93 school year this special education block grant, 75 percent of it to all accredited private schools.

Mr. Chairman, special education: we have released today the consultation paper in response to the Member for Ponoka-Rimbey. The reason why we've put a lengthy front piece on the consultation response is to assess the breadth and width and depth of the response. If it's only from one element in the community, then that's got to affect how government establishes policy, and we're going to distribute it far and wide so that hopefully there is a good representation from parents, from native people, from students' associations, from school boards, trustees' associations, teachers' associations, and others. That is the reason why. Are we going too quickly, says the hon. Member for Stony Plain, in the integration mode? No. In my view I don't think we are because the most important part of the placement of any child has got to be how you best meet that child's unique individual needs. If you're saying we're moving too fast, well, just like I say to folks when they say we're moving too fast on anything else, tell that to the two Germanys, who came together in 300 days. Tell that, in this case, to the parent of a spina bifida child who wants so badly for that child to have as normal a life as they possibly can. As long as we focus on what's best for that individual child, we are not going to have a case of integration for all and a case of one size fits all. It can't be that. It must be what is best for that individual, unique child's needs.

Mr. Chairman, one comment about Athabasca-Lac La Biche. There was some concern that the government was somehow shortchanging the folks in Athabasca-Lac La Biche. I'd say on the contrary. When I see a press release by the MLA for the area, dated March 3, announcing that the school division will receive an additional \$200,000 in contingency funding for the present school year, that shows commitment. When I see that the average per-student expenditure in the province is in the order of \$5,400 and Lac La Biche is at \$6,000 and the province funds nearly 80 percent of that, I say that that's a substantial investment by the taxpayers in the province, backed up and promoted by the MLA for Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

Members have commented about boundaries, and frankly, it baffles me that a member from any side of the House, including Calgary-McKnight, would be talking about the Minister of Education having to force or coerce or entice school boards to do what is the right thing to do. The Lakeland school division came together in the right possible way because they said that this is the right way to go. It didn't take coercion. It was a suggestion, perhaps, but the suggestion has been made by this Minister of Education that there are numerous regions of school boards in this province who are perfect candidates – may I call them candidates? – for marriage, an amalgamation. I just say don't whine, don't complain, don't wait for coercion or enticement, do what you know is right, and get on with the job.

I was fascinated, and I've been looking for the opportunity to remind the hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight that she and the Member for Stony Plain 367 days ago in this very Chamber advocated a two-count system.

AN HON. MEMBER: For ESL.

MR. DINNING: Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight said:

I suggested two funding dates to the minister. He indicated some interest, and I would like to ask him: has he implemented two funding dates for ESL?

And the minister said,

Would you support it?

The member said,

Definitely.

The minister said:

Okay. Up and down?

And the member then said:

Maybe two isn't enough, but two will do. Up only. Oh, up and down? Well, as long as it meets the needs. If the number of students goes down, of course you wouldn't have to fund as much. That only makes sense.

MRS. GAGNON: For ESL.

MR. DINNING: For ESL, Mr. Chairman. How do you make an argument for only part of the financing of schools? It's just fine for ESL, but it's not fine for the rest of the school system? What the hon. member opposite is saying is that it's just fine for taxpayers to pay their tax dollars for an education for a child who is no longer at school. If the hon. member wants to suggest that and go and say to taxpayers, "We're going to bilk you out of your dollars in order to pay for an education for children who are no longer in school," you go and sell that. I'd say to the hon.

member that she ought to go and sell that. I know exactly what taxpayers are going to say to her, because they've said to us in spasms in this government that this is the right way to go.

Mr. Chairman, there are several questions, of course, that were asked under vote 1, some concern about Information Services and a reduction in the number of permanent, full-time positions. There were vacancies in that area, and as the Provincial Treasurer announced the other day, in those areas where there are vacancies, we abolished those positions.

In the case of vote 2, there is a significant increase in funding for Building and Equipment Support, but more importantly for pupil instruction, and that is to not only pay for the 3 and a half percent grant for the current school year but also for the enrollment for next year as well as the 3 percent.

Mr. Chairman, I know that there are several questions that need answering, but in view of the hour I would hope that if the hon. members are interested, especially those from the other side, they might see fit to designate Education again, and we could again have this lively and most informative and enjoyable debate.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise, report progress, and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Education, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: Do members concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, by way of information, on Monday next in the afternoon we will deal with Government Motion 4, which deals with the special select committee on the Constitution, followed in the evening – and we will be sitting on Monday evening – with Committee of Supply, dealing with the Department of the Attorney General.

[At 12:59 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 2:30 p.m.]

