

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 7, 1992**

2:30 p.m.

Date: 92/05/07

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Oftentimes, hon. members, we forget that these proceedings are carried on radio and television. Today this prayer I offer to some special people in southern Alberta. One was born on the prairies, but the other was born in the Azores and chose Canada. But together we all make this great nation what it is and what it can be.

We give thanks to God for the rich heritage of this province as found in our people.

We pray that native-born Albertans and those who have come from other places may continue to work together to preserve and enlarge the precious heritage called Alberta and the heritage called Canada.

Amen.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

MR. PASHAK: Mr. Speaker, it's with a great deal of pleasure that I table the first of what I trust will be a series of annual reports by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This report covers the activities of the Public Accounts Committee during the Third Session of the 22nd Legislature.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar, notice of motion.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to give notice that after question period I will propose the following motion under Standing Order 40:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta send its sincere congratulations to the 14 outstanding women who received honours at the 1992 YWCA dinners in Calgary and Edmonton this week.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table with the Assembly today the 1990-91 annual report of the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file responses to the following motions for returns: 284, 295, 296, 297, and 298.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. SPEAKER: Rocky Mountain House, followed by the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we have as special guests three very important people from the constituency of Rocky Mountain House. They're up here on some very special business promoting tourism in their community and want me to extend to you and members of this Legislature a special invitation to an international marathon swim on August 7. They are Mayor Ross Shuman, Peggy Findley and Marg Phelan, members of the Economic Development Committee of the town of Sylvan Lake. I would ask them to rise, and would the Assembly please give them a cordial welcome.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, followed by Advanced Education.

MR. KOWALSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the members' gallery today are two prime supporters of the equine industry in the province of Alberta: Mr. Yvon Brochu of Stony Plain, who's a board member of the Alberta Racing Commission, and Mr. Rennie Gellner, who's the manager of the Canadian Thoroughbred Horse Society. They're in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the members.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome today on behalf of Premier Getty some 50 senior high school students from around the province of Alberta who are in the public gallery and are part of the Forum for Young Albertans program. These students are participating in a unique nonpartisan program which gives them exposure to the people and processes of the different levels of government. The major political parties, the judiciary, the media, as well as business and labour are just some examples. With them today are chaperons, if they are still in order in the '90s: program executive director and former Medicine Hat alderman Blair Stolz, who at one time served this House as a page, Annette Klausen, Amy Hanson, Canice Tang, and Nadia Jagar.

These students have spent a considerable amount of time this week discussing and prioritizing their own views on the Constitution. They also prepared presentations to celebrate and encourage national unity. Tomorrow they will be debating two motions raised in private government members' hour in a mock parliamentary debate, and those, I understand, are being kept secret until tomorrow. This evening they'll be having dinner with their respective MLAs. I would ask that these exciting young people from the Forum for Young Albertans rise and have members of the House welcome them.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and to members of the Legislature 35 visitors from St. Vincent de Paul school in the constituency of Calgary-North West. They are accompanied by their teacher Mr. Pat McMillan, and there are three parents as well: Mr. Kerr, Mrs. Jasinski, and Mrs. Anderson. I'd ask them to rise in the public gallery, and I'd ask my colleagues in the Legislature to extend a warm welcome to these students.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 37 students from grades 5, 6, and 10 from Grassland community school in the constituency of Athabasca-Lac La Biche. They are accompanied today by their teachers Mrs. Anna Johnson and Mr. Ray Huot, bus driver Ken Wolak, and also parent Mrs. Sandra Mannen. I'd also like to advise the Assembly that Ryan Mannen, a page here in the House, is the son of Sandra Mannen. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period
Lottery Funds**

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, for years the New Democrat opposition has been calling for full disclosure of lottery expenditures in the Assembly. For years the government has resisted, and I believe we know why the Getty Conservatives won't disclose full

expenditures. It's because they don't want Alberta taxpayers to know how all the money is being spent. The latest chapter happened yesterday in Public Accounts, where a New Democrat asked questions of the Auditor General. The Auditor General had to say that there's \$13 million worth of expenditures about which he is told absolutely nothing, and he implied that this is contravening the laws of the Alberta. So I'd like to ask the minister responsible for lottery expenditures just how it is that he plans to start conforming with the law and when we can expect to see full disclosure of all lottery expenditures through the public accounts.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question. I also would welcome an invitation by the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to appear before Public Accounts and discuss any and all matters relative to or arising out of the Auditor General's report.

What I just find some degree of difficulty with, Mr. Speaker, is that there are two annual reports printed that cover all lottery expenditures on an annual basis. One is a report that's printed by the Western Canada Lottery Corporation called the annual report 1991, which clearly outlines all of the expenditure levels related to lotteries. The second is called the Western Canada Lottery, Alberta Division, 1990-91 annual report. Both of these reports are made public on an annual basis. These reports have been public for a number of months. They outline entirely the whole level of all expenditures related to any aspect dealing with lotteries in the Western Canada Lottery Corporation or Alberta Lotteries. There's a line covering all items dealing with \$13 million worth of expenditures.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, I would invite the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, I would invite any member of the NDP caucus, I would invite the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to invite me to appear before Public Accounts. I would be delighted to go through each and every line . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Good. Thank you. We look forward to a supplementary, line by line.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that those reports do not come under the purview of the Auditor General, the person who is hired by an all-party committee of this Assembly to scrutinize every expenditure conducted by the Alberta government. That's the issue, and this minister shouldn't imply that it's anything else.

Will the minister now agree, if he's so satisfied that his accounting through those other reports is so accurate and above question, that he will submit those to the Auditor General as part of the annual report of the lotteries of Alberta?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the annual reports and the administration dealing with the governance of the Western Canada Lottery Corporation and, in fact, Alberta Lotteries are both audited by professional accountants, chartered accountants, members of the professional association. It is signed by Ernst & Young, the latest report signed in Edmonton, Alberta, May 28, 1991. If the Auditor General of the province of Alberta has not received a copy of the report, I'll make sure that the Auditor General receives a copy of both reports.

This is a professional matter. If the Auditor General of the province of Alberta is saying that these professional accountants, members of their profession, Ernst & Young, are not doing an accounting or audit according to all the principles established by

the profession, then I wish he would say it, or if that's what's being implied by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, I wish she would say it.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that these numbers do not come under the purview of the Auditor General for Alberta.

So let me make another point clear. The problem really originates with this minister and this government by virtue of the fact that they won't bring the estimates, how they plan to spend the lottery revenues, into the Assembly. If they would do that, there would be no problem at all. Is the minister or the government now prepared to bring lottery revenues in front of the Assembly on an annual basis so that the entire Assembly can decide how that money is spent?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, this is the blue book known as Government Estimates and Capital Fund Estimates, 1992-93. This is part of the documentation that was provided by the Provincial Treasurer. If the hon. member would go to page 117, under the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services estimates she would see vote 8, Gaming Policy, Licensing and Control.

The estimates of the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services will be brought before this committee. In fact, they can even be designated. If the Leader of the Opposition chooses by, I think, 4 o'clock on a Monday to designate certain estimates for Wednesday of that week, that minister will be called. We've now been in this session, Mr. Speaker, for nearly four or five weeks. I have not received an invitation by the Leader of the Opposition to be designated. I would be delighted to be here next Wednesday afternoon, the earliest appropriate time, to deal with the estimates, if the NDP would invite me.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question.

MS BARRETT: I'd like to designate the second question to the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

Tire Disposal

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, *Maclean's* magazine says that he hates to work and he's not interested in policy, but aside from that, I'd say we've got a great Premier here in Alberta, just first-class. On February 13 the Premier announced that he will review the awarding of contracts to recycle the annual supply of 2.5 million tires in the province of Alberta. At that time, the Premier rejected a request by the Minister of the Environment that it be reviewed independently by the Ombudsman. So far the only thing that this review has achieved is yet another review announced yesterday into incineration and pyrolysis. Of course, much has been made about the timing of the announcement, but I'm wondering if it has any substance. I'd like to ask the Minister of the Environment - oh, no Minister of the Environment, no Premier. Perhaps I could ask the Acting Premier if he would explain if there's anything new in the fact that the government is creating a review. Or are they merely trying to create some false hope and expectation for people in the Trochu area that there'll be some relief down the road?

MR. FJORDBOTEN: Mr. Speaker, as the Acting Minister of the Environment I'm happy to take that question as notice, a comprehensive question. I'm sure the minister will respond when he's back.

MR. McINNIS: Well, perhaps I could ask a simple question, then, of the Acting Premier. The government previously awarded

a contract to recycle 1.3 million tires in the city of Edmonton and a further contract to process and recycle 1.2 million in Okotoks. That takes care of 100 percent of the supply of used or disused tires in Alberta. Now, unless the government's planning to import some tires from British Columbia or China or Palm Springs, we've got no more tires to go around. So I'd simply like to ask the Acting Premier how stupid the government thinks people in Trochu are.

MR. ADAIR: Mr. Speaker, it's true that if you're here long enough, you finally get to be the Acting Acting Acting Premier.

In answer to the hon. member's question, I think that I would indicate that the answer by the Acting Minister of the Environment for the previous one will be the same for this particular one. We'll pass it on to the minister and respond.

MR. McINNIS: So he can't explain how he can get more tires than the 2.5 million they've already given contracts for.

Well, perhaps the Acting Premier could answer this question. In the news release yesterday the government said, "We did not put sufficient emphasis on those applicants who proposed pyrolysis or incineration," a very difficult claim to evaluate since the real Minister of the Environment has now refused twice to release the ministerial advisory committee report that came to that conclusion. I would like the Acting Premier to explain what right the government has to withhold that information, the report on which the decision was based, and the current circumstances.

MS BARRETT: Good question.

MR. ADAIR: Good question.

MS BARRETT: Well, it is.

MR. ADAIR: Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. In the same sense, not having the knowledge of that particular one, I'll take it as notice and pass it on to the minister.

I assume that I may get a question quickly that I can answer for you.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon, on behalf of the Liberal Party.

Lottery Ticket Printing

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question continues to the minister of lotteries. Last winter Albertans were shocked to learn that the minister of lotteries had moved the printing of lottery tickets to his hometown of Barrhead without allowing any other towns to bid on the project. During the last couple of months I've been told by at least three people seeking jobs in this plant that they were told to drop off their résumés at the MLA's office. Now, this minister is known to use a sort of Alabama style of political operating, but will he confirm that he is now acting as an employment agency for the ticket printers?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, one of the initiatives in terms of the improvement of job opportunities in the province of Alberta and the procurement of Alberta-based products that are purchased by the Western Canada Lottery Corporation was a very aggressive decision made several years ago that placed within the province of Alberta would be increasing opportunities for Albertans to either participate in or procure or deal with the Western Canada Lottery Corporation, which has its head office located in Winnipeg,

Manitoba. We do 57 to 58 percent of the sales of the Western Canada Lottery Corporation in the province of Alberta, and we determined as a policy that 57 to 58 percent of the activity of the Western Canada Lottery Corporation be placed in the province of Alberta.

Decisions were made that one portion of the Western Canada Lottery Corporation would move to the community of Stettler, Alberta. A second decision was made that ticket printing, which is private-sector printing, a contract awarded to a private-sector firm by the name of Pollard Banknote Ltd., with plants in both Winnipeg and the interior of British Columbia, would move to the province of Alberta and begin the printing of tickets within the province of Alberta and provide opportunities for some 50 Albertans. Pollard Banknote Ltd. selected the community of Barrhead on their own, and I want to make that very clear, and I'll say that again in this House.

If any member in the opposition chooses to imply anything else, Mr. Speaker, there is a legitimate mechanism of this House that, I think, allows a charge to be made. So if any member chooses to do that in the opposition, please let them bring forth those charges.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

Supplementary.

2:50

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is maintaining his reputation as a great humorist anyhow.

Could we go on then? He didn't answer the question of why he is taking résumés in his office as to whether they can work in this plant. Would he go this far: the only reason he is asking that people drop off their résumés at his office is to make sure that they have the right political connections and the right political work background before he'll let them go on and get a job?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, when the announcement was made in the community of Barrhead last fall, Pollard Banknote Ltd. said that they would begin receiving applications from any individual who would choose to work in their plant. I have a constituency office in the community of Barrhead. There's also an economic development office in the community of Barrhead. We were asked, the MLA for the constituency of Barrhead as was the Barrhead economic development committee, if it would be inconvenient if individuals came and expressed an interest in having a . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: All right. Thank you. [interjections] Order. Hon. minister.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, as a convenience to not only the people who live in the constituency of Barrhead but those who live in Westlock-Sturgeon and other places, if they phoned my . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order, hon. minister. Order, hon. members. I think that's enough. You're wasting your own time, and I'll stand here as long as you want, until the end question period.

Hon. minister.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, when individuals phone my office in Barrhead and inquire how to submit an application to Pollard Banknote Ltd., we have said that if they choose to bring it to my constituency office in Barrhead, we would be pleased to

forward it to Pollard Banknote Ltd. in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I have received applications in my office that are not opened by me or anyone else. They're put in an envelope. It's a convenience to the people. Just over the weekend I received two from people in Westlock asking me to convey them to Pollard Banknote Ltd.

Now, further to this, Pollard Banknote has indicated that they will start screening their applications midsummer. They will train the individuals. For the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon to make an attempt at humour in terms of an MLA helping his constituents and other Albertans I think is . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Supplementary question, Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: I regret that I have hurt his feelings.

I'm on to the third question. I could remark, too, Mr. Speaker, that if indeed the applications are in, why did he ask for open envelopes? So he could look at them before he passed them on? The question is this: will the minister agree to refer this practice, a very questionable one at best, one so odious that it smells all the way over here . . .

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. Order. [interjections] Order.

Perhaps if you have questions without words like "odious" and so forth. Just the question, please.

Lottery Ticket Printing

(continued)

MR. TAYLOR: I'm sorry. I wouldn't want to refer them to the hon. member's headquarters again then.

I will only say this then: would he agree to refer this rather questionable practice to the Ethics Commissioner for a ruling?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to do that. I will publicly ask the Ethics Commissioner to inquire into the question of whether or not it's appropriate for an MLA in the province of Alberta, when he receives a request, to refer something to an employer, whether or not the MLA should do that. I do that for constituents who read the publication put out by the public service in the province of Alberta advertising jobs in the province of Alberta and who come into my office and say: "Would you use the courier system to send this into Edmonton? Would you convey this to the appropriate agency?" I do that. I support my . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. [interjections] Order. It certainly appears that one caucus had a happy lunch hour, actually probably two.

Drayton Valley, followed by Calgary-Forest Lawn.

Highway Cleanup Program

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Knowing this government's long-standing and continued support for the 4-H movement in Alberta, I'd like to ask a question of the Minister of Transportation and Utilities, and hopefully he can answer this in his own right without having to take it under advisement. There was a 4-H cleanup on the highways last Saturday, and I wonder if the minister could just give the people of Alberta an update on how this proceeded this year.

MR. ADAIR: Mr. Speaker, yes, I'd be delighted to. At the same time I would also like to express a concern. Delighted in the sense that there were 7,640 young people who participated in the cleanup on the weekend, there were 4,500-plus adults that were involved in that over the weekend, and no incidents were reported. That's the good news. The other good news is that they picked up 54,046 bags of garbage. I guess the concern that I have is that was primarily put there by Albertans, and that was on only 7,600 kilometres. This is the 16th year of that particular practice going on, and the sum of money will be roughly around \$173,000 that we will pay to those organizations, be they 4-H clubs, Air Cadets, school groups, church groups, or whatever the case may be. I want to thank those young people and those adults for the time that they gave on this particular weekend.

MR. THURBER: A supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Knowing that the safety of these children is always of paramount concern to this government, were there any added precautions taken that were different from other years to maintain this safety?

MR. ADAIR: Not really. A couple of years ago, after the unfortunate death of one young fellow that was involved with the cleanup, we put together a kit, and that kit is for a training program for both the adults and the young people prior to going out on that particular day. I might also add that they've done that extremely well. One of the problems we were having was that a lot of the adults were really down in the ditch picking up garbage rather than being between the children and the road, and that, to my knowledge, worked extremely well this year. They were picking up garbage, but it was closer to the road, and the young people were in the ditch. That really helps.

I should also point out that, if you recall, when we made the initial announcement, it was for the past weekend and if any areas got rain it would be for the next weekend. One area did, and it happened to be my own area. They were both rained and snowed out in the High Level area, and it will go on May 9 in that area. So to the people driving on the Mackenzie Highway, Highway 58, and any other roads in the area, please watch those young people who are out picking up garbage.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Forest Lawn.

Ethics in Government

MR. PASHAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal report on the immigrant investor program has called the program a threat to Canada's image abroad. No doubt the Joe Dutton fiasco has damaged the program's credibility almost as much as it has tarnished Alberta's image. Today it was reported that the gold mine to which Dutton sold his fund, from which he pocketed some \$3 million for himself, has announced that the gold reserves are less than a quarter of the original projections, and the company's share price has tumbled some 90 percent since last December. My question is to the Minister of Career Development and Employment. Given that Mr. Dutton elected to violate the terms and spirit of his offering memorandum and sell his fund to a high-risk gold mine when he had an opportunity to invest in a secure office building in Regina, will the minister now advise the Assembly when Albertans can expect a decision as to any impropriety on the part of Mr. Dutton?

MR. WEISS: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting. I think the hon. member should pose his question to the House in Saskatchewan. It's predominantly and mainly a Saskatchewan

issue, as this was entirely dealt with by Mr. Dutton in a Saskatchewan offer, and it has nothing to do with Alberta whatsoever. There was no violation under any Alberta contract or any Alberta offering or any Alberta sale. I can't understand what the hon. member is referring to.

3:00

MR. PASHAK: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the minister knows full well, Mr. Dutton worked in one of our offices abroad, and that's where he established all of these contacts. He made these contacts under the name and authority of the Alberta government.

Today we also discovered that our province has attracted only 3 percent of the money that has come into Canada under the program, while B.C., which has identical guidelines, received nearly three times that amount. So my question to the minister is this, Mr. Speaker: will the minister admit that the reason for Alberta's dismal performance under this program is because this government, in accordance with its general policy, has chosen to approve the appointments of well-connected political cronies like Joe Dutton, who was also, incidentally, awarded one of the most lucrative wine licences in the city of Calgary, instead of basing approvals on the merits of the offerings and the character of the principals that are involved?

MR. WEISS: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to deal with the specific question as it relates to Alberta and why we are so low on the totem. I accept that. That's very objective reporting. They are valid reasons. That's why this minister took the responsibility and challenge to first take on and negotiate with the federal government to have a new level playing field. The tier structure has been changed, and if he would refer to and look through the article, he would also see that in December of '92 we would anticipate and project that Alberta will be back in the game, alive and well. We certainly look to increase offerings and take-up in that business investor category.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Whitemud.

Lottery Funds (continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all remember the expensive, personalized Samsonite briefcases and the infamous junket to the Far East by the Member for Red Deer-North, all paid for with lottery funds. To the minister responsible for lotteries: why does the minister insist on hiding the full details of the \$13 million lottery operational costs?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the Western Canada Lottery, Alberta Division, 1990 annual report lists the figures on pages 6, 7, and 8. So let us begin: 1991 salaries and benefits, \$3,716,169; advertising and corporate community relations, \$3,001,863; travel, \$711,732; professional fees, \$434,623; maintenance . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister.

MR. KOWALSKI: I'm trying to answer the question, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling **Repeated Questions**

MR. SPEAKER: I know. Thank you, hon. minister. I wish that other members would realize that they're asking repetitious questions.

What's the supplementary, please?

Lottery Funds (continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, to the minister responsible for lotteries and, some would claim, Barrhead employment: will the minister table in this Assembly a detailed accounting of these expenditures including all travel to out-of-country spots, be it Las Vegas or wherever?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I repeat again what I've said before. I'd be delighted to receive an invitation from the Public Accounts Committee to appear before it. I can be designated. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud can ask any question he wants. I'll give him the answer. I can provide all that information as per the request.

MR. McEACHERN: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, at the end of question period.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Anybody else, now that I'm up to three? Any others? Anybody else want to come in? Thank you.
Rocky Mountain House.

Teachers' Strike in Battle River

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In central Alberta there has been a labour dispute that has closed the schools in 10 jurisdictions for the past five weeks. I know there's been a mediator working on this situation since last September, but there doesn't seem to be much progress. To the Minister of Labour: since there doesn't seem to be any progress, are you planning any action in the immediate future?

MS McCOY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, yes, today I issued a news release that I have appointed a special representative to meet with all parties in the Battle River teachers' contract dispute. I've instructed Ken Albertini, who is former Chair of the adjudication division of the Industrial Relations Council of British Columbia, to meet with Battle River area trustees, teacher representatives, and home and school associations still affected by the strike. We have two boards that have actually come to a settlement. Mr. Albertini will gather information about the position of each party and explore all possible options for a negotiated agreement. He will then report to me next Monday.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. That's good news.

I'm curious whether in fact he is going to be getting both parties together and seeing if we can hammer this out over the weekend.

MS McCOY: To my knowledge he's on his way down to Red Deer now, even as we speak here in the House. His first request is to speak to the bargaining team representing the boards and then the bargaining team that is representing the teachers. He also wishes to meet individually with each school board in the area and with each group of teachers' bargaining units in the area and also with each home and school association in the area. Now, he would be hoping to do that in the course of the next two or three days.

One of his tasks is to explore whether indeed there is any area in which the parties can come to a mutual agreement. He will be working very hard to do that, and if there isn't any likelihood at

all that that is possible, he will be sitting down with the two bargaining teams. I for one sincerely hope that they will. It's simply unconscionable to continue to hold these children at ransom. We cannot afford to put their future at risk any longer.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the minister of Occupational Health and Safety. It's now been some three years since this minister has had this portfolio, and in that time he's only introduced one minor amendment to the occupational health and safety regulations of the province. Let's contrast that to the province of Ontario, where the New Democratic government has introduced 21 new or amended health and safety regulations, five of which have been major new initiatives. So I'd simply like to ask the minister this: can he explain how his total nonperformance in this area of introducing health and safety regulations can be interpreted by Alberta workers as anything less than a total disregard for their well-being?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate that Ontario had to do that because there was a need for it. There is no need in Alberta.

MR. GIBEAULT: That explains the Liberal government in Ontario, but what about this minister's performance here? That's what we're talking about today.

I'd like to ask this minister when we're going to be getting these regulations. In particular yesterday or the day before in the Occupational Health and Safety estimates he said that the asbestos regulation was going to be coming "very, very quickly." Mr. Minister, when exactly will that regulation be coming forward?

MR. TRYNCHY: Very quickly, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: West Yellowhead, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Fuel Contamination Incident

MR. DOYLE: It's almost a year now, Mr. Speaker, since the report on the government's investigation into the Hinton tainted fuel incident was released. The report indicated that the bungling by various government departments in the initial handling of the incident meant that we would probably never discover the culprit or culprits responsible for injuring some 200 Albertans, some of whom continue to suffer to this day. I would like to ask the Solicitor General if he would tell the Assembly what preventive measures have been taken in the two years since the poisoning to ensure that no Albertans will ever become the innocent victims of another crime such as this.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I think that this is probably better addressed in some other departments, but again we have asked, as we did before, for a full report from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I will certainly follow up with Assistant Commissioner Holmes to check where that is at this time.

MR. DOYLE: Seven of the victims, Mr. Speaker, have launched lawsuits to try to get some compensation for their suffering. Unfortunately, Don Johnstone, the most severely affected victim, is prevented by the Workers' Compensation Act from suing anyone in this matter. He is forced to rely on a WCB pension of

less than 10 percent of what he was able to make when he was able to work. Would the minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board, in recognition of the government's original mishandling of this matter, show Albertans that he really does have a heart and either authorize some form of special compensation for Mr. Johnstone and his family or at least permit him to initiate a lawsuit?

3:10

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's a sad case with the gentleman from Hinton who had this difficulty, and we all agree. Now, the Workers' Compensation Board toured the province and went to 20 locations over a period of time, and they were in Hinton. I was wondering if the MLA for the area, West Yellowhead, made a presentation on behalf of the gentleman. I've asked the Workers' Compensation Board to review the matter and provide everything that's available that is fair and just and right to the injured worker, and that's what they've done. If he's not satisfied, then there is an appeal process, and of course he can also take it to the Ombudsman. I hope he'd go through that route, but I cannot instruct the board to pay something that's not there.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Forest and Wildlife Management

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The expert panel on forest management chaired by Professor Dancik criticized the lack of a provincial strategy for wildlife management. A survey of professional foresters in Canada carried out in 1990 indicated that 55 percent of Alberta foresters consider that wildlife management is a very or somewhat serious problem. To the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife: when can we expect the minister to respond to these concerns by properly enhancing wildlife monitoring and management in this province?

MR. FJORBOTTEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all the Dancik report made a number of recommendations. A number of them we have already acted on; a number of them we are now working on. Some of them that we have acted on have to do with the whole area of wildlife and enhancing the number of fish and wildlife officers we have in this province. In my budget this year I have an addition there as well as the restructuring within the department to make absolutely sure the co-ordination between forestry and fish and wildlife is more compatible.

MR. MITCHELL: We have seen the promise, Mr. Speaker, of three additional ecological reserves, presumably in the near future, but there is still almost no proper protection of boreal forest reserves in this province. Is the minister working with the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation to designate large-scale ecological reserves in the boreal forest region of the province, reserves of sufficient size, not postage stamps, to be properly self-sustaining?

MR. FJORBOTTEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that sounds all very well in the way the member phrases his question, but real life is this: about 14 percent of Alberta is presently very well protected under ecological reserves, under natural areas. We are looking at doing even more. We have recently the Lakeland park. We are looking at also setting aside forested areas. We recognize the need for old growth forests. I would ask the hon. member to please look into what we've done, even in the last six to eight months, to recognize we've made considerable progress.

MR. SPEAKER: Highwood, followed by Edmonton-Beverly.

Environmentally Responsible Products

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. A year or so ago the hon. minister announced an initiative on procurement of environmentally responsible products. My question to the minister then: is this program moving ahead in an orderly way, or is it on the back burner or under the carpet?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, in the spring of 1991 the government announced a policy called the procurement policy on environmentally responsible products. We announced that in essence we would be attempting to ensure that we would use environmentally safe products, green products, within the public service and the organization known as the government of Alberta and that we'd attempt to reduce waste as much as we could with respect to these matters. A year ago we had some 40 products that were available to various government departments. That number has now risen to some 250 such products, everything from various kinds of papers to the kinds of fuels that are used in some vehicles, toner cartridges for xerox machines, and that sort of thing.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain whether his department is in the process of replicating the costly propane conversion of motor vehicles and reconversion to gasoline, which the Canadian defence department has experienced, while expending over some \$10 million on that exercise. Is he doing that?

MR. KOWALSKI: No, Mr. Speaker, we are not. In the spring of 1991 we announced that we would be undertaking a pilot project with the utilization or the transfer of some vehicles within the system and converting them to natural gas use and then running a test project for about a year to determine whether or not it was economically a good investment to do it, as well as environmentally positive. I don't have the full report yet, but the tentative results seem to indicate that it makes no economic sense to convert to natural gas unless there is a certain amount of mileage used per month and there is access by the vehicles in question to distributorships that sell the fuel. I gather that the federal government through the Department of National Defence spent some 10 million bucks and decided that it wasn't such a good project. We're going to continue to evaluate it. As one of the authors of a report that was published in 1986 or 1987, a document called *The Environment and the Economy*, which coined the phrase "sustainable development," that's the principle we're using with respect to this project in 1992.

Belmont Correctional Centre

MR. EWASIUK: Mr. Speaker, recent difficulties at the Edmonton Remand Centre are not the only problems that are facing the correctional centres in the Solicitor General's department. The Belmont Correctional Centre is also plagued with problems. My question is to the Solicitor General. Is the minister aware of the problems at the Belmont Correctional Centre, and if he is, what is he planning to do about them?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of the Edmonton Belmont centre and its function. We review our centres on an ongoing

basis. I'm not aware of any imminent problems at that centre. I do know that it's a minimum security, community correctional centre which has a bed capacity of about 252. At the present time it has about 160 people on an ongoing basis. On average there are 45 correctional people who work there. It functions very well in many areas for people who are a minimum security as they enter back into society. If the individual member has any specifics, please bring them forward.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I have some specifics, and I'll be delighted to bring them to the minister. For example, there are questions very similar to those at the remand about understaffing, particularly by experienced staff. There are the practices of favouritism and inexperienced personnel carrying out duties that jeopardize their own safety not to mention the safety of the community in which they function. In particular, there is also a problem with federal prisoners being housed at what used to be a minimum security facility. My question to the minister then: is the minister prepared to meet with some of the staff members that work at the Belmont centre to get the complete story of the difficulties in that facility from both sides, management and staff as well?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the staff of the Solicitor General's department meets on an ongoing basis with all of our personnel in corrections. If there is a need there or if there's an ongoing discussion out there at the present time, we'll certainly be willing to meet with them.

I just want to stress, so that there is nothing left as a tremendous safety problem to the public, that the Belmont Correctional Centre houses provincial inmates who have received a minimum classification as well as intermittent servers and fine defaulters. In addition, both male and female offenders who have been released on day parole and by the National Parole Board are admitted to this centre. These are minimum security individuals that need help in their transition into society, and I want to assure everybody that there's no insinuation here that there are grave public safety concerns.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Family Violence

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions, too, are to the hon. Solicitor General. Last year the former Solicitor General indicated that he would respond to our request to investigate the highly successful London model for responding to family violence. This is the program that's run under the aegis of the London police department. Will the minister bring the House up to date as to the work he has done in investigating this model?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, our department has done extensive investigations not only on that model but on the problem as it exists in Alberta and throughout Canada. We have an interdepartmental committee that involves not only the Solicitor General's department but social services, Health, and the minister responsible for women's issues. I know that in the future, as we go through our estimates as well as the program on family violence, we will be indicating what our research has brought forward and bringing new initiatives to address family violence in the province of Alberta. We will be doing it forthwith. As I have in other reports that we have and other discussions, I will assure this Assembly as

I stand here today that all information will be brought forward not only to this Assembly but to the people of Alberta, and we will take some brand-new initiatives relating to family violence.

3:20

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Perhaps the minister, however, can tell the House now what kinds of specialized training police officers have received since some of these new initiatives began. Does that training include an examination of officers' attitudes towards women?

DR. WEST: The latter part of the question I can't specifically give an indication on here today, but I can say that the Solicitor General staff training college here in Edmonton has an extensive program of education for training officers. As well, the individual municipal police forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have set up within their organizations training modules that educate the police officers in their approach to family violence and how they handle it, as well as a better understanding of it.

We're in about the second year of a three-year project that we started in 1990, and I can indicate that some of the progress made is encouraging. We have seen some 3,545 cases since reporting has started, and a 54 percent charge rate in those. We're working in our correctional institutions on helping those individuals, not only the perpetrators but also some of our female offenders who have themselves been victims of violence in the family. Along with that goes training of our correctional officers, as well as education of the police officers.

MR. SPEAKER: Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

Native Criminal Justice

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this afternoon is to the hon. Solicitor General. We all know that Alberta, under the leadership of our Premier, has taken a leading role in dealing with aboriginal issues and with aboriginal people. An example of this: even in this House we have three aboriginal members on the government side. The Cawsey report, Justice on Trial, was released over a year ago with over 300 recommendations. Could the hon. minister advise this Assembly what action his department has taken to address the issues recommended in the report?

DR. WEST: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, you can see by the number of questions that the Solicitor General's department impacts on all levels of life.

MR. BRUSEKER: Even low life.

DR. WEST: I'm pleased to be able to report on this one.

The Cawsey report, Justice on Trial, a report on the criminal justice system and its impact also on Indian and Metis people, is one that we can well be proud of. I think it's one of the best reports in Canada at the present time on our criminal justice system and its relationship to the aboriginal people.

The 340 recommendations were compressed into about 10 themes. Our department has been working in consultation, following the report, with the aboriginal people and the Metis people in relationship to programs we can start. We have probably started to give direction in about 35 percent of the 340 recommendations.

Let me just give a few examples. We're working in aboriginal policing. The Louis Bull police service has full policing responsi-

bility at the present time. We're working with the Blood tribe to do their own full policing responsibility. Other correctional initiatives have been in three major contracts that we've signed, one with the Yellowhead Tribal Council, which provides community correction programs as it relates to probation, temporary absence, supervision, and fine options. As we go forward, we're going to work with the elders of the various groups to look at community justice committees and models that will work on the various nations and reserves throughout this province. There are 43 of them. I'm very encouraged with the level of communication and consultation that we've had with the . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Supplementary, Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Member for Calgary-North West may think aboriginal issues are low; that's what he seems to indicate across the floor here. I disagree with him fully, of course.

Mr. Speaker, my supplementary to the hon. minister is: could the minister advise this Assembly what action he'll be taking to encourage other departments within our government to participate in addressing some of these issues that are outlined in the report?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, the criminal justice system, not only as it relates to aboriginal people but to our total society, needs an ongoing review. I have been very impressed with my discussions so far with the aboriginal people and the Metis as to their full understanding of the criminal justice system and what needs to be corrected to better fulfill a direction for our young people. I'm going to take those communications that I've had with them and communicate with the Attorney General's department, as well as with the Solicitor General, Doug Lewis, in Ottawa, to see if we can't formulate some new, innovative directions, not only for aboriginal policing and their justice system but how it may run over into the rest of the system.

I also will be communicating with Career Development and Employment to understand what programs can be brought forward as alternative measures within the system and also with social services, because we know that in some areas 85 percent of the population are on some form of social assistance and we need alternative measures to help those families that are impacted by the criminal justice system and need help getting back into a full, productive life.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

First, the Member for Highwood and, secondly, the Minister of Family and Social Services.

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

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 35 dedicated students from the Prairie junior high school in Three Hills. They are accompanied today by Mr. Gord Robideau, Mrs. Patty Kleven, and Mr. Glenn Steeves. I'd ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Family and Social Services.

MR. OLDRING: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me at this time to take this opportunity of introducing through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 59 students from Mountview elementary school, located in the constituency of Red Deer-South. I wouldn't want to give my colleagues the wrong impression or I wouldn't want them to think that the students didn't appreciate the questions and the answers that we provided this afternoon, but I think we did test their patience a little. They have been somewhat restless, but perhaps we can learn from the model behaviour they maintained throughout this question period.

I also just want to make note of one of the students. Nicole Redel is seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, the granddaughter of a former member of this Assembly, the late Norm Magee, who served the single constituency then of Red Deer from 1979 to 1982. I would ask the 59 students and the 10 teachers and parents seated in the members' gallery to now rise and receive the warm reception of this Assembly.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of a Member

MR. SPEAKER: First point of order. The Minister of Career Development and Employment.

MR. WEISS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is based on *Beauchesne*, page 141, section 481(c), which I'll refer to while making my point of order. Earlier in question period the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper stood in his place to ask a question, and in doing so, he made reference to the absence of the Minister of the Environment. On occasion, due to ministerial responsibilities, ministers, as well as MLAs, sometimes have to excuse themselves from House duties. Then, as well, as a courtesy the deputy House leader advises the Official Opposition of the ministers' absences.

I'd like to read, then, what section 481 refers to:

Besides the prohibitions contained in Standing Order 18, it has been sanctioned by usage that a Member, while speaking, must not . . .

(c) refer to the presence or absence of specific Members.

I would suggest, therefore, that it was no surprise to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place that the hon. Minister of the Environment was absent, as later in the session the hon. member himself was to be excused but graciously returned to his seat to allow the point of order, I might add. In doing so then, Mr. Speaker, I would ask your ruling on the point of order.

3:30

MR. McINNIS: This is a very serious matter, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually glad that the minister raised it. It is true, you know. Our Standing Orders provide at section 10 that

every member is bound to attend the service of the Assembly, unless leave of absence has been given by Mr. Speaker.

Beauchesne states very clearly that

in modern times the ensuring of attendance in the Commons has become a principal function of the party machinery. The Whips of the various parties make it their duty to secure adequate representation.

I don't want to reflect on the presence or absence of the Whip, but I do want to say that this list that's provided by the House leaders is usually 30 to 40 percent inaccurate. The Minister of the Environment showed as absent yesterday and was here. Today he shows as absent and he's not here. Whether I can or can't know – for example, the Minister of Labour was shown to be absent but

was present; the minister of economic development, shown to be absent but was present.

MS BARRETT: No, he was shown to be missing.

MR. McINNIS: Or he was missing but here. If we ran our lives according to this list, we'd be in all kinds of trouble. I simply would like to make the observation: what in the world kind of government has 13 ministers absent on one day?

My question wasn't to the Minister of the Environment at all. I was trying to ask a question to the Premier, who didn't show on the list as absent. Found out he wasn't there so I tried the Minister of the Environment. He wasn't there. So I tried to get the Acting Premier, and the government was so confused that the Acting Minister of the Environment stood up. What kind of a way to run a government is this?

MR. SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, I think that sort of clears the air a bit on it. Very skilfully done by Edmonton-Jasper Place to then go through a roll call of the House this afternoon, but all of it's still in contravention of what *Beauchesne* clearly states. I'm quite certain that we now have vetted enough that we really don't need to be referring to absence and presence in the House.

Point of Order

Tabling a Cited Document

MR. SPEAKER: The second purported point of order, Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Mr. Speaker, my point of order relates to *Beauchesne* 495(a), and it is because the minister of public works read extensively from a particular document. I believe it was some kind of a financial statement related to the Lottery Fund, so therefore he should table it in the House. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. I know it's a minor point, but I assume you mean 495(1) not 495(a). But that's beside the point.

The documents that were shown that I could see from the Chair seemed to be published reports, but the Chair will certainly undertake to check with the minister to make certain that any documents cited at any kind of length would indeed be tabled if they're not already made public.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, my point of order covers actually all the way from 485 to 492. It was on your question of ruling me out of order on the word "odious." I have checked, and I can't find it there. I know you have put more words in that "questionable" category than any other Speaker in the history of this House, but I couldn't find odious. When I think of all the alternatives to odious, I think odious is not too bad.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, thank you, hon. member, for pointing out that part of my fame and notoriety is caused by members of the House making various statements that had to be called to order. It was not done at my instigation.

However, the member was not called to order so much because of the use of the word "odious," even though that was mentioned by the Chair. The problem was that we had a very extended series of questions – I believe this occurred with one of the supplementaries – and that in actual fact so much time had transpired.

Together with a lot of laughter – believe you me, the Chair is all too welcoming of the fact that there be lots of laughter here using up the time of question period. It makes life easier up here. The real problem was that the hon. member was going on too long with regard to the supplementaries.

Thank you.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

MR. SPEAKER: Now might we go to a Standing Order 40 request, please.

Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In speaking to the urgency of the motion, last night and Tuesday evening in Alberta, in Calgary and in Edmonton, the YWCA held tribute to women dinners. The object of these events is to acknowledge the manifold contributions of women in many fields of practice and activities in our communities, distinguished women without whose activities our communities would certainly be not as rich as they are. The nominations of many of the women emphasize those whose work often goes unrecognized, unrewarded, and unnoticed, yet it's of great significance in our lives and in the lives of those they serve.

I believe members of this House should express their gratitude to the YWCAs in presenting us this opportunity to acknowledge these women who are honoured here. The women whose names I'll read, Mr. Speaker, are simply illustrations, constant reminders to us as the beneficiaries of the many acts of courage and compassion and creativity that they have performed. I ask for unanimous consent of the members for approval of this motion.

MR. SPEAKER: The first request is the matter of urgency. All those in favour that the matter proceed to be dealt with, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Thank you.

Perhaps the hon. member would now like to move the motion.

YWCA Awards

Moved by Mrs. Hewes:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta send its sincere congratulations to the 14 outstanding women who received honours at the 1992 YWCA dinners in Calgary and Edmonton this week. Those who received the women of distinction tribute were the following: Dr. Sheila Malm, Maureen DeSorcy, JoAnne James, Candace Struthers, Vivian Ayoungman, Dr. Nancy Brager, Patricia Allen, Dr. Maire Duggan, Theresa Maxwell, Mary Englemann, Phyllis Giovannetti, Alice Elzinga, Margaret Mooney, and Betty Rawlinson.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, I am privileged and honoured to move the motion.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, just very briefly, I would like to commend the hon. member for bringing forward the motion and indicate on behalf of the government our total support with respect to this motion not only to these outstanding women, as the hon. member has indicated, but to the YWCA, because to initiate this sort of a program obviously takes a lot of thought, a lot of planning, a lot of organization. The principle to which it is directed is important to all of us, and we just want to lend our

support and our congratulations and best wishes to all those selected.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to also thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and give our support to this motion. I think for too long women's contributions have been invisible and unrecognized. However, throughout history women have contributed to the betterment of society through their work in health care, science, art, religion, literature. So we need to commend the Y for their initiative in drawing our attention to the contributions women have made to our society, to honour the women that were in fact honoured last night and know that they are but a tiny number of the many, many women who make such significant contributions to the well-being of our society.

3:40

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Labour.

MS McCOY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very much pleased to have this motion and wish to support it on behalf of all my colleagues.

I was lucky enough to be at the Calgary women of distinction dinner this year. There were 41 nominees there. In Edmonton there would have been a like number. As we say, every nominee is a woman of distinction, and every nominee truly is a role model for all of the rest of us. The theme for the Calgary dinner was Champions of Change. I think that's a very appropriate theme for all of the women of distinction that we have in Alberta.

I'm very pleased to support this motion.

MR. SPEAKER: Question? Summation.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion before us, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion carries, let the record show unanimously.

Speaker's Ruling

Point of Order

MR. SPEAKER: Before moving on, the Chair has been in receipt of a note. I thought I had made it abundantly clear that if there were any other points of order today that notification be given. The Chair had three down here, and the three have been dealt with, but I've received a note saying that it was understood by some members of the House that the Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn wanted to raise a point of order. I cannot comment whether he's present with us or not at the moment. If indeed the member wishes to raise a point of order, it would be dealt with tomorrow if the member is indeed in the House.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I move that the written questions on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places except for the following: 166, 169, 179, 180, 182, 351, and 352.

[Motion carried]

Recycled Paper Use

166. Mr. Mitchell asked the government the following question: What proportion of paper purchased by the government in a calendar year is recycled paper, and what is the average content of postconsumer waste in the paper?

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, the government rejects 166.

Oil Consumption by Government Vehicles

169. Mr. Mitchell asked the government the following question:

- (1) How much oil was consumed by the government for cars, trucks, and machinery for the years 1989 and 1990, and
- (2) how much of this oil could be substituted by recycled oil?

MR. GOGO: The government likewise rejects 169, Mr. Speaker.

Office Space Leasing

179. Mr. Decore asked the government the following question: What is the projected per square foot cost on an annual basis of the Federal Public Building at 98th Avenue and 107th Street, Edmonton, compared to the cost of the space the government now occupies in the Olympia & York development at 101st Avenue and 102nd Street, Edmonton?

MR. GOGO: Reject, Mr. Speaker.

Office Space Leasing

180. Mr. Decore asked the government the following question: Is the government renting private-sector space in downtown Edmonton which costs more than the projected cost of the renovated Federal Public Building on a per square foot basis?

MR. GOGO: Reject, Mr. Speaker.

Office Space Leasing

182. Mr. Decore asked the government the following question: What is the number of square feet involved in the payment of \$4,117,464 to Petroleum Plaza Investments Ltd. and Canapen (Petroleum Plaza) Ltd. by the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services during the fiscal year 1989-90?

MR. GOGO: The government rejects that question, Mr. Speaker.

Fuel Consumption by Government Vehicles

351. Mr. Mitchell asked the government the following question: What was the average highway fuel consumption per kilometre rating for the government fleet of cars as at January 1, 1992, excluding ministerial cars, and what was the average rating for ministerial cars, based on the Transport Canada fuel consumption guide for each model of car?

MR. GOGO: Reject, Mr. Speaker.

Civil Servant Parking Subsidy

352. Mr. Mitchell asked the government the following question:

How much did the government spend on subsidized parking for its Edmonton-based employees, and how many parking spaces were subsidized in the downtown area of Edmonton – i.e., the area approximately defined between the north bank of the North Saskatchewan and 104th Avenue and between 97th Street and 114th Street – in the 1991-92 fiscal year?

MR. GOGO: The government rejects 352, Mr. Speaker.

Motions for Returns

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I move that the motions for returns on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Infrastructure for Remote Communities

210. Moved by Ms Calahasen:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to work in a multifaceted way with small and remote communities and, where applicable, the federal government to develop necessary infrastructure, including but not limited to the provision of water, sewer, and power services.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I raise Motion 210 today to draw to the attention of this Assembly that without targeted help and specific commitment, when mainstream Albertans are basking in the warmth and the luxury of the technological era, generations of people, isolated community residents, will still be without basic services. Northern residents will still have to haul buckets of water or snow to heat on a stove for cooking and washing clothes and will still have to use outhouses or five-gallon pails for toilet facilities. As an example, 17,000 people living in communities in northern Alberta do not have access to basic water, sewage, or waste disposal services. This is equal to every man, woman, and child in the Stettler constituency or every eligible voter in Edmonton-Kingsway not having running water to wash, shower, or use the toilets.

The problem we are addressing today is this: we need to empower communities. This can be done in a number of ways which will not cost the province an outrageous amount of money. Once people are empowered, they can begin to access basic services. Presently Albertans living in remote communities do not have total access to basic services which other Albertans today take for granted. At the current rate of progress and given today's fiscal climate, Albertans living in remote communities will not receive water, sewer, power, and other minimum standard of living infrastructure services until long after this province has celebrated its hundredth anniversary.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

A multifaceted effort is needed to expedite the attainment of basic services for the people of Alberta's remote communities. We need to do the following: we need to recognize as an Assembly that this problem exists. While we need to acknowledge that the Alberta government has made tremendous contributions to community development throughout the province, especially in

the last 10 years, all sectors of government must appreciate that substantial needs still exist in the remote communities. We need to make resolving deficiencies a priority. We need to dedicate ourselves to working with communities to ensure that they get access to needed services. We also need to empower these communities to better articulate and achieve their own goals. We need to be sensitive with our efforts to the needs and the ways of the people and not be judgmental. We need to be fair-minded in our endeavours; they must be in keeping with the best interests of all Albertans. The people in these communities are not asking for preferential treatment, only fair access to what we all take for granted each and every day.

I recommend that Motion 210 be done through the Legislative Assembly, encouraging the government of Alberta to spearhead a multistakeholder effort to develop essential human and physical infrastructure required in remote or small communities to bring them in line with the rest of Albertans.

While I will be speaking of service-type infrastructure and basic human empowerment, I have spoken to the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, who will be addressing other aspects of human resource infrastructure and development in his comments on this motion.

The ultimate aim of Motion 210 is to give every Albertan at least fair access to a reasonable quality of life in Alberta. The contributions of the Alberta government to infrastructure development over the years have been tremendous. As local municipal entities the IDs have done a great deal to develop infrastructure over the past decade with the help of the province. The government has accepted the role of being responsible for creating and maintaining a good climate for business investment. Creating such a climate included assisting in the development of roads and other infrastructure as well as the provision of social, health, and educational services.

When I asked my communities to submit information for this motion, many indicated in their letters and calls back that they were very grateful for the assistance provided by this government. Special thanks must go the hon. Premier for his leadership. Thanks is also due the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities, responsible for the Northern Alberta Development Council. He has implemented and followed through with many beneficial infrastructure programs for roads and services. Many dollars have been invested in the north through the Alberta wastewater supply and sewage treatment grant program, the northern supplementary fund, and the rural electrification program. In fact, it was at the direction of the Member for Peace River that the Alberta municipal wastewater partnership was reviewed and later made more flexible, to the benefit of small and remote communities. I'm hopeful that progress will continue to be made. I appreciate that there is much political will within this current government and the Assembly to help the disadvantaged and the aboriginal people. Local municipal entities, as I have indicated, have also provided their help, and I encourage them to continue to do so.

Substantial needs still exist, however, and now is the time to address these needs. In the north 65 communities are without either water, sewer, or both: 22 are in need of just water services, 18 are in need of just waste and wastage infrastructure, 25 are in need of both. I have broken this analysis into communities by classification. I have also highlighted the many infrastructure needs in Lesser Slave Lake as the disparity is highest in my own constituency. Twelve hamlets are in need of water, and five of these are in my own area. Sixteen are in need of sewer, four in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Nineteen are in need of both; three are in Lesser Slave Lake. The Metis settlements: four are in need

of water, two in Lesser Slave Lake; one is in need of sewer in Lesser Slave Lake. Indian reserves: six are in need of water, two in Lesser Slave Lake; seven are in need of both, one in Lesser Slave Lake. In total, Albertans in 47 hamlets, 12 Indian reserves, and five Metis settlements need assistance so they can access basic services.

3:50

Let me just give you an example of what it is like in some of these communities, because I feel that there is a definite need for more understanding and sensitivity of all people. Life in general moves at a different pace in the remote north. There are few jobs; therefore, no widespread clocking in. There are few stores, and a shopkeeper who lives in the building or near it will open up for those in need. Remote communities are not normally white-collar communities. Government workers and paid consultants must be committed to making allowances for these cultural ways. Ministers of my own government have graciously agreed to visit the remote communities in my constituency. Most of the comments that I hear are that it's very much a whole other way of life.

Some departments and consulting groups are very firm on not doing full public-participation processes with aboriginal remote communities because they are labour- and time-intensive when labour and time mean money. This results in structural discrimination against those not involved in the process. Expensive or not, Mr. Speaker, these consultations are equally as important as consulting with other Albertans. Change within the improvement district structures themselves must occur in order to allow all those in need to articulate their positions and overcome barriers.

I often hear from improvement district councillors that it is difficult for councillors to be effective when there are such differences among councillors and divergent interests and aspirations among residents. First, our current improvement district system goes against the way the people of the remote north traditionally do business. They work in what we call an aboriginal way, the way of what is a true participatory democracy. Every family has an equal say in building the consensus decision that the community representative will take to council. Other elected representatives, however, can speak for the community from what is believed to be the best interest of the electorate.

Second, some interests are based in industry, others in farming interests, and still others in underdeveloped community basic-service interests. These are not always compatible aspirations.

Third, there are sometimes language barriers. This is particularly of concern during technical discussions. Because of structural problems and cultural clashes, the remote communities are at a disadvantage within improvement districts, above and beyond all other obstacles they face. The disparity is deep, to the point where councillors are seldom re-elected in the remote communities because they are not more effective in councils when really they are doing the best that they can do. Then the communities also lose because the continuity again is gone and remote communities are at a disadvantage.

Passing judgment on the people of the remote north rather than offering assistance must come to an end. The following are some of the comments that I have heard in my term on NADC. "The people of the remote communities don't contribute to the tax base. They have no reason to expect services or a say in the allocation of ID funds." In the first place, the "he who pays the piper" scenario is not always appropriate. Remote communities do contribute to the tax base, and as part of the ID, provincial allocation is apportioned to them through the ID. These remote northern Albertans are caught in a vicious cycle of underdevelopment. They do not have money to develop their communities

because they have no industry or very little employment, and they cannot attract industry or create jobs because they have no services. At some point this cycle must be broken. The underdeveloped communities must be allowed to better themselves.

Another one: "It is unfair to punish or even disallow developed communities that are ready to move on to rural districts to incorporate because they are located within the same regions as remote communities." If the provision of infrastructure is seen by the bureaucracy as punishment, then this is all the more reason for senior government intervention. The saddest part of this whole situation is that the frustration and resentment which is currently growing will continue to build unless intervention is made possible. The cycle of poverty and low standards and quality of life in the remote north cannot be allowed to continue. A solution which is fair to all Albertans, and that includes aboriginal Albertans of varying status, must be found.

"They expect services but are not willing to make this an easy process." European settlers to Canada planned and built communities based on traditional European checkerboard or grid patterns. Aboriginal people settled in the traditional semiclustered settlement patterns, which can be linked to aboriginal settlements around the world. These settlement patterns are chosen for religious and family reasons. Neither of these is superior. Each services a different life-style and a purpose. It is not that northerners are trying to be difficult. Families and family ties are very important to northern aboriginal people. We encourage large families. We encourage extended families. This is not normally the European way. These different ways have kept mainstream society from understanding remote northerners.

On top of the more service-oriented types of infrastructure perhaps what is needed is a new kind of government structure. The people of remote communities should have direct involvement in the decision-making process so that they may be able to go after their own goals for the long-term benefit of their own communities. This can even be accomplished within the current improvement district structure without great expense. Over the last year I have been promoting a community government model which was brought to me through constituents and the Metis Nation. This proposal was received with enthusiasm by the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and by some members of caucus. It was also received with interest by improvement district councils and officials in Municipal Affairs who deal hands on with improvement districts.

Given the current viability study reviews taking place in IDs 17 and 18, this would be a perfect time to have this hamlet government concept thoroughly reviewed. I have satisfied myself that the concept does not envision anything other than a responsible degree of local government development based on the existing mechanisms and paced in accordance with the requirements and abilities of local people.

It seems like we've got so much work that has to be done, and we seem to be running into a lot of problems. However, what I see is that a co-operative effort of stakeholders has to be orchestrated, and I have five suggestions.

One, I am asking that this Assembly encourage our government to bring the much-needed effort together. Generations may continue to grow up in despair, may continue to live in poor conditions without hope unless joint efforts to provide services are undertaken.

I also request that a task force be struck to put into place a multistakeholder planning and financing action plan to address the needs of these Albertans. I suggest that the Treasury Board consider the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund as a mechanism

where we can get some money for a contribution towards getting these services installed and the needs met.

I request and ask ministers to place infrastructure provision, sensitivity training, and person-centred service delivery as priorities of their personal agendas and on the discussion agendas with their federal counterparts.

I further ask that all ministers with official involvement in this settlement of land claims continue the fight to get the federal government to settle outstanding land claims. I ask the minister of rural development to solicit the involvement of the LDI group in this process by having them go to the north, to the isolated and remote communities, to consult the people and bring them into the process. If the LDI group is unwilling, then I ask the minister to assign another group to see that this effort is made.

I ask that the ministers responsible for rural development, Municipal Affairs, and Alberta Transportation and Utilities encourage the federal government to do as much as possible in terms of investing in the future of these people's lives.

I make the plea to all members of this Assembly to join me in this battle to bring water, sewer, and other infrastructure necessities to the Albertans living in the remote north. These are good people who deserve your understanding and commitment. I call for action by this Assembly, and I ask to have Motion 210 passed as a sign of much-needed hope for the future.

4:00

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to Motion 210. Certainly I want to support the hon. member's comments and urging of the government that she has just put forward that the need and requirements to address the many issues are certainly causing difficulties and problems for our rural people particularly and our northern populations specifically.

Rural communities, Mr. Speaker, are fundamentally important to Alberta's well-being. I think we all believe and understand that. People living in rural areas, in our villages and towns and small cities, want the opportunity to put their energies to work to develop and help the enhancement of their communities. The problem, to some degree, is this government's open-market policy where survival of the fittest is not really serving the best interests of our farming families and farm communities. The difficulty that I have seen and why we have the difficulties in our rural communities is that the government's approach favours corporate farming over family farming and undermines the co-operative marketing approaches of the Canadian Wheat Board and institutions of that nature. This government's trade stance jeopardizes Alberta's dairy, egg, and poultry farmers. At a time of falling prices and record low farm incomes this government has cut important programs like the farm fuel and fertilizer rebates to the farmers. These are some of the problems that are facing the rural communities certainly in all parts of the province and, importantly, in the northern part.

It's no wonder, Mr. Speaker, that in 1988 our rural communities suffered a substantial population loss. Many of the young people have moved into our two major cities. In fact, 90 percent of the population growth of Alberta occurred in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor. Many other areas of the province suffered absolute declines in population. That's quite evident. If we travel the province, we see what is happening to small towns and communities. Stores and businesses that used to flourish are now

boarded up, and people are leaving the community, which simply compounds the overall problems in rural Alberta.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there are some communities in rural areas that are favoured in this province. A case in point has been Stettler and Barrhead. They are being favoured at the expense of other communities in this province, spending money on paving roads and stabilizing lakes at the expense of people services in the province of Alberta. Those are the kinds of things, I think, that are making it difficult for our rural communities to survive when you have that type of approach taken by government.

We believe that there needs to be a partnership between the government and our rural communities. I might tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in our traveling of the province and speaking to municipal councillors, chambers of commerce, economic development people throughout the province – and certainly a good portion of those were in northern Alberta – they're opposed to the kind of treatment that they have been receiving at the hands of this government. Funding decisions are not made at the local level. It appears the decisions are made elsewhere and imposed on the community and the local ratepayers. What needs to be done is an open budget consultation process with municipalities in order to determine their needs and their wishes on how they want to develop their community and what kind of funding and in which direction that funding should be given. Instead, what appears to be happening is that more and more financial obligations are downloaded on municipalities. We noticed several Bills that are going to be before us as an example of that occurring.

A major concern to our local authorities who have to cope with the development of their communities, the need for the funding for the infrastructure that the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche talks about, is that unless there is some planning for funding that's going to assure a steady ability for them to continue with the planning process – the funding that will be available for the construction of roads, the construction of water lines, sewer projects, and housing – you can't do that if you're being financed on a sort of an ad hoc basis. I'm not sure really what's happening in our municipalities. The AMPLE program was available for a five-year period, but then all of a sudden it changed. Now all of a sudden there are moneys, \$200 million, available from the Municipal Financing Corporation, and presumably it's an advancement on the AMPLE program. What happens in the final analysis, Mr. Speaker, is that the municipalities are shortchanged by some \$24 million as a result of that particular manipulation by the Provincial Treasurer.

It's a concern to rural communities and has to be a concern to us in this Legislature as we watch the virtual decline, the rot of rural Alberta as a result of the policies of this government. So I support the member's proposal that there needs to be an active role, an active responsibility taken into consideration when we deal with the province as a whole. It has to be a holistic approach to dealing with the issues in the province, and certainly we cannot and should not ignore our rural population.

The member spoke of the need for water and sewer in the communities, and she is certainly correct. But this government has cut funding by some 27.4 percent in the last four years, almost cutting in half funding that was designated for that particular purpose. So how are we going to improve the standard of living in our smaller communities, on our reservations, in towns and villages, if in fact they don't have, first of all, the financial resources to take on these types of projects?

Mr. Speaker, I certainly rise to support the motion. I think it's a motion that deserves support, and I'll certainly be interested in hearing from other rural MLAs who represent that type of a constituency to come and speak in support of this motion. I think

that if we as a group in this Legislature did that, perhaps we could indeed arouse the interest and concern of the Treasurer and other cabinet ministers to look at providing funding in this direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look at Motion 210 presented by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, and I'm very, very impressed with the presentation made. The presentation was well thought out, and the recommendations are very, very good.

The motion itself is fairly encompassing in that it talks in terms of "necessary infrastructure, including but not limited to." That's very, very important, Mr. Speaker, when we talk in terms of "not limited to," because all the municipalities in Alberta share a common problem in terms of the infrastructure when we talk about sewer systems, drainage, roadways, and so on and so forth. But infrastructure to me means a lot more than that, and I'm sure it does to the Member for Lesser Slave Lake. Infrastructure to me means developing, sustaining small industry and such that will support and provide employment for people within those particular rural municipalities, and they can be, in many cases, conducive to environmental concerns if a bit of imagination is used and some creativity is shown.

4:10

I think when the government went through the process initiated by the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, the hon. Ray Speaker, calling upon the committee that was headed up by Lloyd Quantz and came forward with a report entitled local initiatives, that report made it very, very clear that there was a need for government to demonstrate commitment to infrastructure in rural Alberta, to commit to communication in rural Alberta, and to commit to preserving rural Alberta. In other words, to allow rural Alberta to exist and not turn into a series of ghost towns. That becomes a very, very legitimate concern.

In this caucus we do have the opportunity to fan out to all parts of Alberta, and we do spend a fair amount of time in the smaller municipalities. When we travel throughout various parts of Alberta, we hear the concerns that are expressed to us, and the concerns are that they want a co-operative approach with the other two levels of government. They recognize that they themselves with their limited resources simply can't do it, so they're crying out for a partnership. They're crying out for a government that will show some responsiveness, that will show some commitment to preserving that rural way of life and demonstrate it, not just talk about it but actually demonstrate it.

As honourable as the intentions may be of the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, unfortunately she's part of a government that has not demonstrated that commitment. That is very, very clearly shown by a number of incidents that I can point to: the downloading that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly referred to, for example; the downloading not only to the cities but to all municipalities throughout rural Alberta. Municipalities are the one creature of government that can't afford the downloading. We have the federal government that will download on the province, the province downloads on the municipalities, but the municipalities can only download on one other body, and that is the taxpayer. Of course the taxpayers, particularly those in rural Alberta, are beginning to revolt because they do not see the return of services for their particular dollars that are being spent, and that becomes very, very important.

It's one thing to make a motion or have a private member make a motion, but when that motion is made, there has to be more

than just support by people raising their hands. There has to be the commitment to follow through on those recommendations that have been spelled out. We saw the treatment given to municipalities here very, very recently when the Minister of Municipal Affairs went along with the Provincial Treasurer and took \$200 million that rightfully belonged to the municipalities and said: we're going to give you back your own money from the AMPLE program. Well, that's not a commitment to municipalities; that's not a commitment at all.

What has to happen is an approach that has been advocated for a number of years by municipalities in Alberta and other provinces within Canada. The federation of Canadian mayors and municipalities has worked on the concept of three-way funding for infrastructure throughout the provinces including Alberta. Alberta was not one of those provinces that came forward and said: count us in for our share; we're going to demonstrate that commitment. No, they didn't. The commitment was not there.

Again I have to say that certainly on behalf of this caucus I'll support Motion 210 as presented by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, but I'm not optimistic that it's going to have the follow-up that is required by her colleagues within that caucus. That's unfortunate, because the intent of the motion is very, very desirable. I think it would go a long ways to resolving some of the difficulties we see in rural Alberta, and it would provide for some stabilization of that rural life in Alberta.

So let's show that commitment to that member and not only support this motion but put our money where our mouths are and follow up and do some action.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise today to support Motion 210 because I believe that there is tremendous human waste and suffering occurring in remote northern communities in Alberta, and I know this must end. I personally in the past 35 years lost 45 friends who died due to accidents, et cetera, tied in with poverty. I'm not very proud to mention that, but I think it's only wise for people to hear what goes on in some parts of our province.

Statistics Canada figures show that isolated community residents are falling farther and farther behind the rest of Albertans in terms of standard of living and quality of life in general. In 1971 northern Albertans made an average of 32 percent less per capita income than other Albertans. In 1991 the picture, of course, is a little better; northern Albertans make only 20 percent less income per capita. I think this is probably based on the oil and gas and forestry and other economic initiatives as part of our government's economic initiative plan.

Remote northerners, though, are at the lowest income side of the average. Rising costs of living without a proportionate rise in income are creating a greater disparity. The cost of living in the north is an average of 3 percent higher than the rest of Alberta and in some isolated communities can reach as high as 18 percent in some areas. We still do have communities in my riding and also the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake's, who is introducing Motion 210, where unemployment runs very high: 80, 90 percent unemployment and underemployment.

I know we are dealing with it. I know I'm more optimistic than the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, because he feels that our government will not do anything. I think our government is trying to resolve some of these problems and issues. It's a matter of dollars, I think, and the governments having the initiative to go ahead with some of these programs, but the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Whitemud also should realize that if it wasn't for the Liberals siphoning off over \$65 billion due to the national energy program, no doubt our isolated northern residents and communities would be further advanced in development as far as water and sewer systems.

Now, most of the members in this House know how I feel as to how we could end this poverty and the lack of services, and that's developing jobs where the people are. You know I fought through this House for the last three years for the Al-Pac project, for an example, for Daishowa and other projects. Both the Liberals and the NDs, of course, were dead against the Al-Pac project, and it's a private industry project that will no doubt change the life-style of a lot of northern Albertans. I just today had forwarded to me how Alberta-Pacific will be developing the road network in the northeast half of Alberta. It's over 500 miles of road network that will go by native communities, and we want to ensure that native people benefit from these projects.

Alberta-Pacific's \$1.6 billion pulp and paper mill is 20 percent finished these days. It presently has on-site itself 1,100 employees. Out of that we have 288 local people working on that site, and out of that we have 95 native families working already. This project just commenced very shortly. That's why I say I'm more optimistic than the people opposite as to what direction we are going, but not to say that we don't need more dollars for infrastructure.

4:20

The Alberta-Pacific project itself, for an example, will have an annual payroll of \$75 million injected into northeast Alberta – and again the Member for Lesser Slave Lake's constituents will benefit from that – \$20 million of annual purchases, over \$7.4 billion generated in export sales over the next 20 years, and a 50 percent increase in the local property tax base for the county of Athabasca, which of course also will help improve educational facilities and services for the native residents in that area. The company itself will have over \$200 million per year in operating costs, which is \$547,000 per day. It will be dealing with over 300 suppliers: a real major economic impact in that particular area. Of course, once the job is completed, it will have over 400 jobs at the site itself and another 600 jobs in the forest management area. Three hundred of those jobs should be closer to the Member for Lesser Slave Lake's riding, in the Calling Lake and Wabasca region, and the other 300, of course, would be in Lac La Biche north: Conklin, Janvier, those areas which are occupied by mostly native people. In addition to that, of course, we will be moving forward, hopefully, with a paper mill, which will again inject another \$250 million into the economy in Alberta and create over 200 jobs.

I again concur with suggestions made by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, that the provincial government needs to work in a multifaceted way with small and remote communities and, where applicable, the federal government to develop necessary infrastructure, including . . . water, sewer, and power services.

Efforts are needed for great co-operation and more flexibility within our government departments in order to achieve this. Also, a greater contribution and co-ordinated efforts are needed from the federal government, including the department of Indian affairs and so on.

All efforts need to be person centred with full respect for the wishes and rightful place at the planning table of native residents from these northern communities. The hon. member refers to "necessary infrastructure, including but not limited to the provision of water, sewer, and power." I'd like to add other elements of infrastructure to the list, including suggested health care infrastructure that is needed as an infrastructure which will enhance the

standard of life through human resource development. While water and sewer services are important to promote good living and preventative health care, remote northern residents should also have reasonable access to health care services. A 1990 inventory of infrastructure for northern Alberta communities shows that many remote communities have limited access to health services. Northerners have every reason to expect reasonable access to health care available to them like the rest of Albertans. The establishment of nursing stations or health care centres would be a tremendous contribution to the system of infrastructure for these remote communities.

In postsecondary education, education infrastructure is needed to assist the residents of northern communities to learn to help themselves. The AVC network is extremely important to remote communities and plays a key role in accessibility to postsecondary education. However, the 1990 inventory shows that only 17 of the 63 communities mentioned by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake have local access to these institutions.

The Alberta Opportunity Corps program under Career Development and Employment has also played a tremendous complement to the Alberta Vocational College network. The Opportunity Corps programs provide trades-related training in 14 rural communities in northern Alberta. Minister Weiss has initiated also the mobile industry training centres which offer skills training related to the needs of the forestry developments that are coming on stream in the near future. Through the Metis framework agreement, truck driver and heavy-equipment operation training programs have been initiated and are going very well at this time. These are important services to the people of remote communities in northern Alberta. These flexible programs enable northern Albertans to learn to help themselves. They are strengthening the individual and the community.

Northerners need assistance to bring all of these infrastructure developments together, and locally based human resource development centres are needed to ensure, where possible, that local people are employed and trained. They are also needed to ensure that local people get the training needed to do the jobs that will be available through the forestry and oil field industries.

In 1990 I raised a motion to support human resource development offices, urging this government to establish a co-ordinated system of delivery through Career Development and Employment, Family and Social Services, and also federal manpower. Two pilot projects have now been initiated in Athabasca-Lac La Biche. One project in Athabasca was initiated just last fall where social services changed its delivery system completely, where Career Development and Employment is incorporated in that system. The federal manpower is also included in that. The project is very, very successful. We're within a few months of operation. They placed, I believe, over 40 people in training institutions and over 100 people into jobs and came into contact with over 1,800 people.

Due to the time, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche has moved that debate on this motion be adjourned.

Are you speaking on the motion to adjourn?

MS CALAHASEN: Yes. I'd just like to make some final comments, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all members, first of all, for their support on this motion. It gives me great hope in seeing that we have a caring nation here.

I would like, Mr. Speaker, to urge all members to support Motion 210.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, I think that in view of the time, the Chair should take the opportunity to say that Standing Order 8(3) requires that we move to the next order of business.

All those in favour of the motion to adjourn debate on Motion 210, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The motion carries.

It being 4:30, we will now, pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), move to the next order of business.

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

4:30 **Bill 206**
Children's Rights Bill

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce Bill 206, the Children's Rights Bill.

The intent of this Bill being introduced to the Legislature – once again I'm asking for your support for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Bill 206 is a carbon copy, Mr. Speaker, of that convention, which was adopted by the General Assembly in November of 1989. That was exactly 30 years to the day after the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child. The Act simply brings into one document not only the civil and political rights of children but also their economic, social, and cultural rights.

The convention sets out state obligations towards the child. These obligations may be of a direct nature, providing educational facilities and ensuring proper administration of juvenile justice, for example, or of an indirect nature, enabling parents, the wider family, guardians to carry out their primary roles and responsibilities as care givers and protectors.

Mr. Speaker, the convention is an instrument to be used skilfully and systematically if it's to be in any way effective. It will oblige all individuals and organizations working with or for children to take notice of the new approach and, in particular, to undertake an in-depth and ongoing self-education process as to what the rights of children really are and what kinds of actions are required to promote and defend these rights.

I would also like to mention, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of articles in the convention fall under provincial legislation and jurisdiction. Alberta legislation, as I understand it, is in compliance already with the convention. None of our current legislation needs to change. But it does mean that the government is going to have to care for its children and is going to have to implement policies to deal with issues that our current legislation does not address clearly; for instance, poverty, counseling programs for abused children, and so on.

I just wanted to comment on the program that will be of interest that was announced by the federal government this week, a program making available \$500 million over five years to help poor and abused children. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that this program from the federal government acknowledges the needs that the children's rights convention is attempting to deal with. The program of \$500 million sounds very generous, but of course

there have been a number of criticisms leveled at it because it appears to be concentrating on communications.

The initiative will fund prevention with \$50 million; protection, \$17 million; promotion, \$73 million. But it also is for developing and publicizing guidelines on children's nutrition, distributing pamphlets to expectant mothers to tell them how to reduce the risk of low birth weight babies and to encourage them to breast-feed, building the RCMP's missing children registry, and, finally, helping the provinces and territories develop more effective ways of collecting child support from delinquent fathers. Now, while those are all good and proper objectives, distributing pamphlets is in fact not going to deal in a very direct way with the kinds of problems that we are experiencing here in Alberta and, I'm sure, throughout the rest of the country. What I'm suggesting is that if we do – and I believe we should – support Bill 206 and adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we will have to then properly, and as we should, deal with some of those needs in our province.

Mr. Speaker, it should be emphasized that neither the existence or content of the convention denies or reduces the importance of the family; quite the contrary. The convention is not concerned with regulating interaction within families, nor is it a checklist of claims, however legitimate, on the part of children vis-à-vis adults. In the final analysis, it's a catalogue of situations and guidelines that governments must be prepared to accept, in theory at least, as falling within their individual and collective responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, it's apparent to me that our Bill 206 and the convention will be in keeping with the present government's latest stance on family, and in particular the release of the Family Policy Grid, a family policy framework for the province of Alberta. I'd ask members of the House to compare principles one and two of this family grid with the convention. In the first place, the grid recognizes and supports families as fundamental to the strength and stability of society, and second, supports and supplements the ability of families to fulfill their essential roles and responsibilities.

Compared to that family grid, we look to the fifth paragraph of the preamble of the convention, which states:

Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

Article 3, section 2, of the convention speaks of ensuring the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible . . . and to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

So we see, Mr. Speaker, that the convention and Bill 206 simply reinforce exactly what our province is promoting in a family policy framework for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, although our federal government has ratified this convention, the formal signing of which took place in December of last year, Alberta now is the only province that has not ratified it. Why Alberta would be the sole province to refuse ratification or delay such an important document is embarrassing, frustrating, and disappointing to me. Why hasn't the province? I don't have an answer to that, and I think we should expect one from government members. The provincial government needs to decide what they're going to do about this convention. Each province that is in agreement is expected to submit a report to the federal government related to their ratification status. Is Alberta going to do that? If not, why not?

We understand that the Alberta government has been delaying ratification based on certain misinformation and what we believe to be a misunderstanding of what some articles in the convention

set out to do. There have, I submit to you, been a number of concerns raised with respect to specific articles in the convention which are contained in our Act, and these need to be raised. Hopefully, the exercise will serve to educate members here and ease their concerns.

Some people have expressed fears that the convention will prejudice the authority of parents. Concerning the respect and recognition of parents, the authors of the convention have no intention whatsoever of undermining it. This is stated in a number of passages, such as article 5: "States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents." Article 18, subsections 1 and 2, quite clearly states that the upbringing of children is the primary responsibility of parents. The convention reinforces, in fact stresses, that the family is "the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children." The convention also sets standards that enhance family life, reaffirming in the preamble that the child should grow up in a family environment. The convention also recognizes, however, that some families, for a variety of reasons, cannot or will not provide this type of environment for children, so they must be protected and nurtured by others. Our Child Welfare Act allows for that, Mr. Speaker.

The convention is pro-family. It is the first convention in the history of conventions to have an entire article on the family which places the state as secondary to the family. Also, as of March 31 of this year, 144 countries have signed or ratified; 39 have not signed or ratified. Of the 144 who have signed, not one of those countries has placed a reservation that the convention is antifamily. Also, Mr. Speaker, the Holy See has said that the convention is in accordance with their policies on family and children.

4:40

What the convention asks us to do is to practise thinking about the child as an individual. This is perhaps the most contentious section of the convention, giving children and young people the right to freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, association, and privacy. It may appear to be in conflict with the rights of parents to guide and control their own children. This is by no means the intention of these articles, because one of the underlying principles of the convention is that no one, including children, can exercise these rights without respecting the rights of others. Of course, these questions only arise once children are old enough to understand the concepts behind the articles.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a document whose intent and spirit means to safeguard children in especially difficult circumstances, children who are victims of hunger, abuse, neglect, and war. Under the convention any restriction placed on a child's exercise of his or her rights owing to immaturity or to conflict with parental rights needs to be justified. Articles 12 through 16 refer to the right to freedom of expression, religion, association, and privacy and are all guaranteed in the Charter. Anyone disagreeing with these articles is, in essence, disagreeing with the fundamental principles of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Article 13, which speaks to the right to freedom of expression, is intended to emphasize the importance of respecting the rights of others. If young people don't feel they have this right, how do we teach them the concept? How will they learn that they can only exercise a right while respecting the rights of others? The convention reaffirms the responsibility of the parent to teach their children the implications of this concept.

Article 14, describing freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, does not mean that parents don't have the right to teach

their children to worship according to the religion they themselves profess. On the contrary, it safeguards the rights so that a child is free to practise the religion of his or her parents. In section 2, "States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents . . . to provide direction," a freedom that has been denied children in many countries. It also means that children must respect the rights of other children to practise their own religion.

Some people have even expressed that the convention would render parents helpless if a child unknowingly got involved with a dangerous organization such as a cult. Protection can be found in Article 16, which allows for a parent to object to a child falling under the influence of an organization such as this. Intervention could be deemed justifiable and in the best interests of the child.

Article 17, too, has caused some anxiety, some people believing that this article means that the mass media was entrusted with the responsibility for providing children with information and material for social, spiritual, and moral well-being and physical and mental health. This is blatantly untrue. This article is simply an appeal for greater media responsibility in assimilating information and material that promotes this well-being.

Article 19 has been misunderstood by some to mean that the convention wouldn't allow parents to discipline their child. This article however, Mr. Speaker, has nothing to do with discipline. It's speaking of violence and the state's response to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or exploitation, including sexual abuse. I should note that the provincial government defined a long time ago in the Child Welfare Act what constitutes abuse as well as how the abuse would be dealt with.

I've also been questioned on Article 24, Mr. Speaker, regarding the rights of the unborn or pre-born child. It was never the intention of the convention to address this question but rather to focus on children in difficult circumstances. The convention aims to protect the millions of children living with hunger, abuse, and neglect. The question of the unborn child is totally beyond the intended scope of this convention. Some also have interpreted that this article would allow young girls access to abortions without parental approval. Article 5 says parental authority is paramount and would overrule article 24.

Article 28 speaks to the right of the child to education. It also has been at times misinterpreted to mean there would be no at-home schooling. Subsection (a) reads that the state shall "make primary education compulsory and available free to all." However, it does not specify or elaborate further as to where the education takes place. As long as the curriculum is being met, parents are free to access their choice of schooling.

Why do we need Bill 206, Mr. Speaker? Well, many in this Assembly have expressed opposition to this Act and to similar Bills that have been introduced in this House. The common theme used to express opposition is that we have adequate legislation right now to protect the rights of children in our province. One only needs to look at the statistics and the circumstances which children are living in to know that our current laws are failing in Alberta. We have children in poverty, children who are abused, and children who are neglected. We have children who are disabled who are abused and live in poverty.

As an example of government legislation, the government, no doubt speaking in opposition to this Bill, can point to the Child Welfare Act as adequate protection, yet year after year we try to explain to them that this Act only protects those children who are receiving services under that Act, children who are either temporary or permanent wards of the province. It excludes countless thousands of other children. Mr. Speaker, here are a few numbers. We all know that one in six Alberta children is living in poverty.

The Social Planning Council of Edmonton stated that 93,000 are living in poverty, evidence that the numbers of children in poverty or living in difficult circumstances are on the increase in the province.

The Senate report that I spoke to last year, called *Children in Poverty: Toward a Better Future*, speaks to the subject of poverty, poor education, and low-wage jobs. It points out the obvious fact that all too frequently poor children grow up to be poor adults. Part of the process, of course, is attributed to the rates of school dropouts among poor children and adolescents. It also forecasts that over the next 20 years approximately 187,000 students will leave school due to poverty. These high dropout rates will cost Canadians an estimated \$620 million in unemployment insurance and an additional \$710 million in social assistance payments. On the positive side, if these high dropout rates were eliminated, Mr. Speaker, research estimates that federal and provincial income taxes would rise by \$7.2 billion, consumption taxes by \$1.15 billion. Finally, incomes would be \$23 billion higher if poverty induced dropouts had gone on to complete an average level of education. These numbers speak for themselves.

The Senate report also found that 51 percent of aboriginal children are living in poverty, and that figure is not significantly different between children living on-reserve or off-reserve: a terrible indictment of what's happening with children in poverty in our country and in our province. Last year we saw the Cawsey report on native reform contain some very damning information with respect to native children. Despite the series of recommendations about aboriginal youth and the needs that are evident, there still has been no action from the present government. It's obvious from the Cawsey report that despite the evidence, all of the reports, and the research, the situation for thousands of children has not changed.

Mr. Speaker, we also see continuing inaction on the potential for Head Start to deal with children who will have difficulty when they get into school. A dollar spent in Head Start equals \$6 saved later on.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, our caucus has been and will continue to be firmly committed to improving the conditions and status of children in Alberta and Canada and in the world. That's why we have introduced this Bill again. That's why we've urged and will keep on urging the province to ratify the convention and to pass this Bill 206. Ratifying the convention means that child advocates will have an international legal document with which to safeguard and increase the well-being of children. It also hopes to ensure that children, as stated in the preamble, will be "fully prepared to live an individual life in society . . . in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity." That's the intention of this convention and of Bill 206.

Mr. Speaker, I ask members of the Legislature to allow this Bill to come to a vote, and I ask for their support.

4:50

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Banff-Cochrane.

MR. EVANS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 206, and personally I want to compliment the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, particularly on her careful presentation and review of both the articles and some of the contentious issues that have arisen as a result of those articles. Certainly when I read through the convention the first time, I had some serious concerns about the issue of paramourcy, and the member has addressed some of those. I think some of those issues would have evaporated had the

preamble been a little more carefully worded and had there been some specific reference to that issue of paramountcy.

As the member has so eloquently pointed out, there certainly are provisions in here, notably article 5, which talk about the importance of the family and recognizing the duties, responsibilities, and rights of the parents. However, with all due respect to the draftspeople of this convention, I think they haven't been careful enough to indicate that that particular provision or any other provision dealing with parental authority would have priority. Thus, we've had some concerns raised that I think for the most part are red herrings but certainly do bear some careful examination.

Mr. Speaker, like all government members in this Assembly, I'm concerned about Alberta's children. My two children are the joy of my life and certainly the first thing I think about in the morning and the last thing I think about at night. I'm very concerned that children in Alberta, in Canada, and indeed globally grow up in a healthy, responsible, and loving environment. I'm concerned that our children in Alberta in particular are free of any form of physical, emotional, or economic exploitation. This Bill focuses on our most precious members of our society, our children. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has chosen, rather than try to recreate the wheel, to take the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has given us the opportunity to have some meaningful debate today on that convention.

As I think most members are aware, a convention is a legal document setting out international standards and obligations on a given subject. In this case, that subject is children's rights. The member states who ratify a convention agree both philosophically and, more importantly I think, legally to abide by the standards. As I understand it, approximately 144 member states have ratified the convention, with another 130 signing the document and thereby agreeing in principle to the formal ratification process. As the member has advised, Canada signed this convention in May of 1990, and at that time all provinces were asked to bring their legislation on-line with the standards of the convention. As I understand it, in December of 1991 the Prime Minister formally announced the ratification of the document, but Canada did not ratify without exception. Again, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has made mention of the two reservations and the one statement of understanding that go along with that ratification. One of the reservations concerns the detention of young offenders and I think recognizes the due process of law, and the other concerns the adoption of children.

Mr. Speaker, the convention endeavours to protect social, economic, cultural, civil, and political rights of children all around the world. It's aimed at children because the UN community of nations has recognized the need for children to obtain special care and considerations. As a group they're certainly more vulnerable than anyone and any other group in our society, other than perhaps our aged senior citizens who are incapable of taking care of themselves.

The convention, Mr. Speaker, gives children the right to survive. It's amazing that we even have to discuss such an issue – nonetheless, we do – the right to survive and to be protected and the right to develop in a safe environment free from discrimination. It also states that children have the right to a name and nationality and the right to live with parents wherever possible. That's one of the main reasons that I became interested in this convention, actually, because as I think a number of members are aware, I've been sponsoring a piece of legislation that I think is directed at the interests of children. When I took a look at article 18, I was very encouraged by the provision that states “both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and

development of the child.” I'll go into a little more detail on that a little later in my presentation, but I wanted to specifically point to that.

The convention also espouses the ideal that children should grow up in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding. Unfortunately, too many times in life that's not possible in the home, in the marketplace, or anywhere else. It's a lofty ideal, and certainly as a philosophy of life I adhere to it as well.

Naturally, the goal of the convention, and by association those states who ratify that convention, is that all children throughout the world will be able to develop fully, with all of the abilities necessary to become responsible members of our society when they become adults.

As I indicated earlier, Mr. Speaker, member states who ratify the convention are obligated to ensure that all of their policies and legislation, both existing and contemplated, meet the standards set out in the convention. Canada, and other states as well, will be obliged to report on a periodic basis to the United Nations, specifically to the United Nations committee on the rights of the child, on measures that have been taken to implement the convention.

I'd like to speak a little bit about what we have in Alberta that attempts to protect the rights of children. [interjection] I think, hon. member, we should take a lot of time on that, because thankfully in Alberta we do have a number of pieces of legislation and other policies that go directly to protection of children. I would say, without fear of contradiction, that Alberta is considered a front-runner in protecting the rights of children. The reality is that in many countries children die from a lack of food, a lack of shelter, and a lack of medical care.

I was given a statistic, Mr. Speaker, that I debated whether I should mention in this House because I was appalled when I heard it. I'm not sure that it's correct – I hope it's not correct – but the statistic is that 38,000 children a day worldwide die because of a lack of the basic necessities of life. If that is correct, then I think we should virtually shut down all of the business in this House and deal with an issue that on a global scale is of catastrophic proportions. I hope that statistic is incorrect, but the research that has been done on my behalf and some of the research I've done myself leads me to believe that may very well be true. I think that is a pathetic reflection on society.

However, in Alberta – and let's concentrate on Alberta – we can be very grateful for the fact that we don't have to deal with some of these travesties that do occur around the world. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has mentioned that one in six Alberta children is said to be living in poverty. We do, however, have to recognize that living in poverty in Alberta and living in a barrio or a ghetto in places around the world are two different things. Thank heaven they're two different things. That's not to be smug about the distinction, Mr. Speaker. That's not to suggest that we should brush aside the issue and say that we're doing as much as we can, because we aren't. There are things that we should be doing, but I want to concentrate on some of the things that are happening today in Alberta.

5:00

Kids in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, aren't living in abject poverty as a rule, as they are in many parts of the world, but our children do have to deal with the issues of the day even though they don't have to deal with some of the devastating effects of war, for example. They do have access to basic medical services throughout our province. They're not forced into prostitution or sold into slavery, as is the norm in other parts of the world. Our kids aren't killed by death squads, like they are in some countries in the

Third World, and they aren't forcibly recruited into the armed forces. Something that's extremely important to recognize is that in Alberta children are required by law to be educated, and that's the way that children will be able to free themselves from these kinds of problems around the world. I think it's extremely important that we recognize that and that we attempt to focus on educating our own children, of course, but educating children around the world.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Alberta's legislation and our agencies which deal with children are the envy not only of the rest of Canada but, I would say, of the world. Human rights, for example, are protected both at the federal level and at the provincial level through human rights commissions. As well, the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families acts in an advisory capacity by studying how various government policies impact the family.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has made mention of the Child Welfare Act. I just want to make a couple of points on the Child Welfare Act. She's expressed some concerns that it doesn't impact all children in the province, only those who have been made wards of the state. I want to talk about some of the positive things that the Act does attend to. It does govern the development and the delivery of protective services for children in need, children who have been identified, yes, but children who undoubtedly are in need. Its underlying principles and values, Mr. Speaker, are very much in keeping with the many articles in the convention and, indeed, with Bill 206.

The Act is based on a set of beliefs about Alberta's children, our families, and the community and how they all relate to each other. Most Albertans, including the government of the province of Alberta, believe that families and the community have the primary responsibility for the rearing of children. Indeed, we believe that children are able to reach their highest potential when raised in that family setting. However, should intervention in the home become necessary for the safety and the welfare of the child, then that Child Welfare Act is a leader in protecting the rights of that child. The Act also includes several matters to be considered, Mr. Speaker, that guide all child welfare work. These matters show the primary concerns of the government when providing protective services for children, such as respect for the child's heritage, respect for the privacy of the family and the recognition that the family is an important social body, recognition that the child is capable of participating in decisions affecting that child, and provision of an effective remedy for the problems facing a child at risk.

The Act also allows for a full-time Children's Advocate. The only job that this individual has is to advocate on behalf of children who are receiving these protective services. Essentially, the office protects children's rights and interests and ensures that their viewpoints are considered, at the same time advising the government about problems in the services available for children. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a leader in protecting children. We have specific policies in addition to that Child Welfare Act that ensure the children are protected, including the Alberta School Act, as I've alluded to before, the requirement that children are educated, the Employment Standards Code, the Public Health Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again I want to go back to something that I mentioned earlier, and that is the importance of the philosophy of article 18. As most members are aware, I see improvement in the issue of access enforcement as a very important issue to be dealt with by this Assembly. I've spent in the last three years quite a considerable amount of time dealing with issues of custody and access. I bring it up again today because, as I've already pointed out, we're very fortunate that our kids are sheltered from

some of these horrible conditions that many children throughout the world experience on a daily basis.

I'd ask members of the Assembly: is it not a violation when in the aftermath of a divorce and a court order exists that provides for access to children, one parent prevents that access from taking place? You see, Mr. Speaker, I'm convinced that a child's right is violated when that child is not given access to both parents when it's an appropriate circumstance for that access to occur, when both parents are loving, caring parents and there has been a decision by a court, looking at all of the circumstances of the breakup of the husband and wife, that access is appropriate for the best interests of the child.

What we need to be concerned about is protecting children from being used as weapons as their parents war and continue to fight with each other. The problem of access enforcement is an issue that's found in every society where we find family breakup, and obviously Alberta is no exception. In fact, the latest statistics that I've read still show Alberta as the unfortunate leader in family breakup, where almost one in every two marriages ends in divorce. It's an issue, Mr. Speaker, that we cannot avoid. We have to deal with it.

Our system's inability to enforce access rights for noncustodial parents has left us with a number of very serious consequences. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, the best interests of the child are not served, because a denial of access undermines the relationship between that noncustodial parent and a child. It brings into question the effectiveness of the administration of justice, and there's often a connection between the denial of access and the problems with support payments. Everyone in this Assembly is well aware that support payments are one issue, access is another. It's completely improper for parties to deny access on the basis of a denial of support and, quite properly, the reverse as well. If a noncustodial parent is denied access, he or she may decide to withhold those maintenance payments, and that's obviously not in the best interests of the child.

When a court order denies access, it's done so, again, usually in the best interests of the child. That's something that has to be dealt with on a continuing basis, and we have to provide a ready access opportunity to the courts if changing circumstances require that an issue be addressed by the courts so that the children's best interests are upheld. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has supported legislation that I have been promoting over the past three years when it has come for debate in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, the government of the province of Alberta has indicated its support for the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We've brought three pieces of legislation on line with the convention, and agencies such as the Children's Advocate, the Human Rights Commission, and the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families lead the country in protecting children's rights. I believe that we have shown leadership in discussing this issue, and I would now like to give the opportunity for other members to make their points on this very important topic.

5:10

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing forward this particular Bill today on children's rights. Our caucus and members of the Official Opposition have always supported a children's bill of rights in this Assembly. Ever since I was elected in 1986 I've introduced such a Bill, and I have not been the only

one to do so. As far back as 1979 the late Grant Notley also introduced, every year, a children's bill of rights. We recognize on this side that children are human beings, that they're not personal property, that they deserve our respect, and that as people they also have rights.

Now, Mr. Speaker, before I get into some of my comments that I wanted to make today, I just have to take exception to a few of the comments made by the Member for Banff-Cochrane this afternoon, because what the member was attempting to do was to compare a poor child in Alberta to a poor child in another country and to say that if you are a hungry child in Alberta, that's not as bad as being a hungry child in another country. I don't agree with that, because an abused child in Alberta hurts just as much as an abused child in another country. You cannot compare the two and say one is worse than another. He also made a comment that children in Alberta are not forced into prostitution, which again I would take exception to, because in fact if he was to go downtown in this very city or in any of the other cities in Alberta, he would find that young people are on our streets because they are forced to be there, and we have a government that has not pressed on to press charges against johns, in this particular case with prostitutes, and it's child abuse clear and simple. The government has really done nothing in that respect.

There are a lot of comments he made. Some I agreed with; some I didn't, Mr. Speaker. We know that Canada, on May 28, 1990, signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child with the intention of ratifying the convention in consultation with the provinces and the territories. This past fall the convention was formally ratified in the House of Commons, but it was done very quietly. To my knowledge it never made the headlines, and it was almost as if we were reluctant as a country, as a government, to acknowledge and be proud of the fact that this bill of rights for children had in fact been ratified in the House of Commons. Certainly at a provincial level, in this Assembly we have never formally endorsed a children's bill of rights. We have heard from the Member for Banff-Cochrane that we are the front-runner in this area, yet this Assembly has not formally endorsed a children's bill of rights. I would simply put the question to this Assembly that if Alberta is such a great place for children to be, then why haven't we endorsed a children's bill of rights? Hopefully, later on this afternoon we will in fact do that in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, one year ago when debating this very Bill, a government member spoke out at that particular time against the need for a children's bill of rights, even though we were still at that time waiting for Alberta to support the United Nations convention at the national level. I was under the impression that eventually the province must have made the necessary changes to some legislation, but again it was never formally endorsed in the Assembly, and I'm not sure exactly what took place there. All I do know is that Canada did ratify, but whether or not Alberta was on board, I'm not sure. I've said on previous occasions that anyone can sign a document or support a Bill, but what is really important is the commitment that goes along with signing such a document or endorsing such a document. Again I will stress that I find it very distressing that this particular Legislature has not in fact endorsed children's rights.

Now, why do we need a bill of rights for children? The origin of children's rights at an international level dates back to the Geneva Declaration of 1924. We then had in 1959 the Declaration on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The International Year of the Child was in 1979, and then came the Convention on the Rights of the Child

on November 20, 1989, when it was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Mr. Speaker, a bill of rights for children sets out the parameters and standards for the protection of our children, not only at an international level but at a national level and, I think very importantly, at the level right here in the province of Alberta. It clearly strengthens and solidifies our support to our children. I believe that by endorsing such a Bill as the one before us today, we in this Assembly will ensure and make a commitment that children's basic needs are met, that a child is protected from cruelty and exploitation, that the best possible care is given to vulnerable children, especially those children that cannot remain at home with their families, and that parents are in a position to care properly for their children. These are some of the principles that we will endorse in this Assembly if in fact we endorse a bill of rights for children. It's very important that as legislators we respect the rights of children as human beings.

Now, when we take a look at basic needs, for example, Mr. Speaker, we look to Third World countries, and we're appalled that children are hungry, that they are not clothed properly, that they do not have access to health care, that they may not even have clean water to drink, and that they are homeless. But if we look in our own province, these very things are happening. Last year when this Bill was being debated, a government member, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, expressed the fact that he felt that we don't need a children's bill of rights because, and I quote,

the Children's Rights Act will not put food into a hungry child's mouth if a parent chooses not to provide that child with food.

That was his justification for not supporting a Bill such as this, along with some other arguments that he used. Mr. Speaker, I was offended at that particular time and also saddened that this member would display such a serious lack of understanding of the realities of what is happening. I have never met a parent who deliberately chose not to feed their children. I think it's incredible to suggest that that is happening, to suggest that thousands of children in our province are going hungry and are going to food banks because parents are choosing not to feed them. Well, that's just not happening.

There is a serious crisis in our province when it comes to children being hungry, children living in poverty. We have thousands of children in this province that come from low-income families, and it has taken organizations, it has taken advocates in the area, and it's taken families to speak out on their behalf, to draw attention to this very issue. We had a Throne speech from the government recently: not a word about this in the Throne speech, Mr. Speaker. We know that children are going to school hungry in this province. We know that. We know that children from low-income families are more likely to experience behaviour problems, that they are more likely to experience low self-esteem. They have lower achievement, lower career aspirations. They have delayed development. There's a higher dropout rate among children of low-income families. They suffer more psychiatric disorders. They enter the child welfare system at 10 times the rate of other children. This is absolutely alarming. And if you happen to be a native child, the seriousness of these indicators is magnified many times over.

I remember being at an antipoverty conference a couple of years ago specifically dealing with child poverty. A judge from Montreal came to speak at the conference, and I think some other members were at that particular conference. I can't remember her name at the moment, but she relayed a story to us that stuck with me for a very long time. She talked about when she was a lawyer and she was representing a mother in the family court because her children were about to be apprehended. The reason they were

about to be apprehended was that they had gone to school one particular day when it had been cold outside and the children hadn't been properly dressed, according to some of the teachers. Someone somewhere along the line was concerned that these children were improperly clothed. That mother was a single parent. She was living in poverty at the time, and so were her children.

5:20

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

The judge made a decision to apprehend those children. There were three children; I think they were three girls. This woman happened to be very close to her children too. They were split up. Two were put into one foster home, and another child was put into another foster home. Eventually the oldest daughter ended up in an institution for behaviour problems. I think she said it ended up costing the taxpayers of Quebec something like – I don't know – \$30,000 in one year to have these children in care. She made the point at that particular time, "What that mother could have done with \$30,000." I think there's a message in that, that we spend money in a system dealing with these children when in fact if we were to direct that money to the families that need the money, we would be far better off in the long term. Mr. Speaker, I think we need to stop and examine our priorities. As a government we have to analyze how we are spending our money, because there are very long-term negative effects that poverty has on children, and those effects are very severe.

I believe we are denying children opportunities that they deserve in life simply because they are growing up in poverty. We are denying them opportunities to reach the potential with which they were born. Mr. Speaker, this is a very sad statement to make because I know that every child has aspirations and dreams regardless of their economic situation. I can say that as a teacher teaching young children, I never came across a single child that didn't have some dreams and aspirations. Not one child ever said to me that they wanted to grow up and be on social assistance or they wanted to be unemployed. Children don't think that way. But somewhere along the line the system breaks down for them, and I think we have to start addressing those issues.

Mr. Speaker, recently the ATA, the Alberta Teachers' Association, held a conference entitled Missing Pieces, and it focused on child poverty. I know that some members of this Assembly sat on the organizing committee: the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the Member for Ponoka-Rimbey, and myself. Other people were involved, and the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche was also involved. I think that we should commend the president of the ATA, Fran Savage, for taking the initiative to form the committee and then certainly bringing forward a conference that I thought was fairly successful in terms of raising the public awareness on this issue. It's very easy to have this whole issue become invisible. People don't want to recognize that poverty is happening in our province, in our neighbourhoods, and in our communities. We can talk about other countries all we like, but I think it's very important that we take a look at what is happening right here in the province of Alberta.

On the Saturday at the conference we all broke into panels, and I happened to sit on a panel with the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're a lucky girl.

MS MJOLSNES: Yes, I was fortunate to sit on the panel; I will admit that.

At that particular time the member said that he had finally convinced the Premier of this province that poverty is a problem in the province. Mr. Speaker, I hope that is true, but when I take a look at the Throne speech, there is nothing mentioned in the Throne speech about the seriousness of this problem. There is really no action in the budget with specific programs to deal with poverty as it relates to children. I really wonder where that commitment is to these kids.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, when we talked about a children's bill of rights, I think in the province of Alberta there were 29 food banks. As I speak here today, I think now the number is up to 40 or more food banks throughout the province. The problem is not going away, we're not decreasing the numbers, and it remains a very serious issue. Children form our largest group of poor people and our single largest group of food bank users. I think we should be ashamed of this. We have low-income families, don't forget though, that are working, and there have been reports put out on some of the kinds of initiatives we need to take in the province in order that we deal with some of these issues as they relate to working low-income families.

I refer to a report called Working Hard, Living Lean, which was issued a year ago I think now, and it was full of recommendations, Mr. Speaker. The report talked about the stigma that is attached to children when they grow up in poverty. One of the concerns they raise is the fact that all children are not able to participate in school activities. This is maybe something that seems very simple, but it's a serious concern that I have. They found in this report when they interviewed parents that the parents were spending all their earnings to meet basic needs. I know I have come across young children that can't go on field trips because they cannot afford to pay the money that it costs to go, so they stay home. I don't know what that must mean to a child, but again I think as legislators we need to be sensitive to these things. Teachers need to be sensitive to these things, and our communities at large need to be sensitive to the kinds of hardships that children experience when they grow up in low-income families.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues just issued a report. Again they talked about the stigma attached to children growing up in low-income families who are not able to participate in activities at school. We've had a report entitled Women Against Poverty put out by the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee, again an excellent report. So there are lots of recommendations out there. They are good recommendations. The research has been done. We know what some of the solutions are, and we have to get on with it. It was once said to me: why don't the poor elect different governments? Well, because most aren't old enough to vote.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I would like to hopefully bring this particular Bill to a vote right now in the Assembly. I urge all members to support this Bill, as we seriously need to endorse a children's bill of rights in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Redwater-Andrew.

MR. ZARUSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's too bad there's not much time left, but I know that the Bill is a concern. I think children are an important resource in our province and a most important area which we have to concentrate on. I can tell you that this government has many ways in which we support children – with our Family Day, with our Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, and also in regards to the Human Rights Commission – which do look after all these areas. I think as we

go on in this government, we will make sure that our children, our resource, are very well looked after.

So, Mr. Speaker, on this note, in view of the hour, I move that we adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the motion, those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion carries.
Government House Leader.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that when the members assemble this evening, they do so in Committee of Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the motion, those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion carries.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

