

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 25, 1992**
Date: 92/05/25

2:30 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province and our country, and in that work give us both strength and wisdom. Amen.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased today to introduce to Members of the Legislative Assembly the high commissioner to Canada from the United Kingdom, His Excellency Nicholas Bayne. Mr. Bayne was recently appointed to the position of high commissioner to Canada. Having just been appointed in April, he's had an opportunity today for his first visit to Alberta to meet with members of the private sector, to meet with members of our government, and to meet with members of the academic community.

Mr. Bayne has had a very distinguished personal career and as well a very distinguished professional career, and to have both of those coming together in this representative to Canada from the United Kingdom certainly bodes well for the Canadian and Alberta relationships with the United Kingdom. Our relationship, of course, is clear to members of this Assembly. It has historical connections, it has political connections in terms of our precedents there, and clearly for Albertans it has very strong economic connections. We hope that those will develop and in fact will strengthen during the period of Mr. Bayne's appointment as the high commissioner to Canada. With Mr. Bayne is his wife as well.

I would also introduce to the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, the high commissioner's supportive staff here in Canada at the consular corps level in Vancouver and responsible for western Canada, Mr. Tony Joy, and his wife as well.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that these distinguished visitors rise in your gallery, and I would also ask that members of our Assembly extend to them the very warmest and best May welcome.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by residents of my constituency asking that the government of Alberta review the present NEF, or noise exposure forecast, contours as they relate to the Calgary International Airport. The residents believe that these contours, legally protected by the airport vicinity protection area regulation under the Alberta Planning Act, are outdated as they have been in place for 20 years.

Thank you.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Belmont.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if we could now have the petition that I presented on Friday last read and received.

CLERK:

To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta:

The undersigned residents of Alberta, Edmonton based members and employees of the Amusement Operators Association of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

That the Legislative Assembly pass a bill, similar to ones passed by the legislatures of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, permitting the private ownership and operation of video lottery terminals.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table in the House four copies of the hundreds of coupons that were sent in to Kerry Diotte. Apparently the Provincial Treasurer didn't want them and asked to have them returned, so I've been requested to present them. On behalf of all of us, including the Mr. Fixit man there, I'll present these tablings in the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Just present them. Thank you.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to file a copy of a background report on a meeting held in the town of Bonnyville yesterday which I attended along with the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of the Environment, and a couple of hundred others. There's also attached a copy of the long-term water management plan for the Cold Lake-Beaver River basin, which was approved by the government in October of 1985.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker I'd like to file with the Assembly the annual report for 1991 of the Alberta Association of Architects.

REV. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file a copy of 15 questions which I asked during the Energy estimates last Thursday night which were not responded to by the minister as well as responses to the six replies that the minister did make to my comments.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair has reservations about that process, and it will be examined.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature 33 students from College Heights Adventist Junior Academy. They're accompanied today by teachers Maureen and Randy Chernipeski and Ernie Nolan and by two parents. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Legislature.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Beverly.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly 65 energetic grade sixers from Belmont school in Edmonton-Beverly. They are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Dave Powley, Mrs. Eileen George, Miss Marilee Dixon, and Mrs. Vicky Paziuk and a parent, Mrs. Bonnie Uniat. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

NovAtel Communications Ltd.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, on Friday the Premier was laughing about over half a billion dollars that this government lost with NovAtel, but Albertans are crying because they have to pay the bill. The Premier's lame defence for this mess is that he's now appointed the Auditor General to look into the fiasco, yet the Auditor General himself says that he won't even be able to point fingers or assign blame. Well, frankly that's not good enough for the people of Alberta. After the fact, admittedly, will the Premier do the right thing and establish now an independent public review into this biggest government loss in the history of Alberta? Let's get to the bottom of it.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed that the hon. Leader of the Opposition would commence his question with a distortion about laughing about the dollars. There may have been something humorous said by somebody during the discussion that may have caused me to smile, but certainly nobody enjoys or feels good about the problems that we're having with NovAtel. I'm disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition would make that kind of a distortion.

In terms of an independent review, Mr. Speaker, that is what we have asked the Auditor to do.

2:40

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, that's absolute and total nonsense, and the Premier knows it. This is a cover-up, pure and simple.

Under 17(2) he's asked the Auditor General to perform "special duties as may be specified by the Executive Council." Cabinet tells him what they want. Even the Auditor General has said that that's not good enough. If he's not going to go to a public inquiry, would he at least, then, look at 17(1), where "the Auditor General shall perform such special duties as may be specified by the Assembly"? Then at least it would be public. Would he at least do that, Mr. Speaker?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is going to hold an independent review, and if the hon. member will only take the time to read the letter of May 21, 1992, which I tabled in the House – you did not want me to read it, and I won't read it today – the Auditor General has been directed by the Premier as President of the Executive Council to hold a full, comprehensive review and to then make his report public. I think we're going to get all of the facts here. I think it's the responsible way to do it.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, it's not the responsible way to do it. This won't come out in public. It'll be whatever they want after the fact. I'd remind the Premier that with the Principal Group, where we lost a lot less money, they finally had to move to a public inquiry, pushed in kicking and screaming, but they eventually had to do it.

My question to the Premier. You're not going to hide from this. Why not do the right thing right now and open it up to the public? Albertans have a right to know what's going on.

MR. GETTY: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition uses the lead-in to his questions to make some statements that aren't accurate. I hope you'll indulge my pointing out that he's wrong. The government did provide a public inquiry in the case of the Principal matter, because it was information that was beyond the control of the government. But here the Auditor General can, in fact, provide all the information, we will make his report public, and he is independent.

For the Leader of the Opposition to say that the Auditor General will conduct a review and that that's a cover-up is quite an alarming comment to make with regard to the Auditor General. That has never been something that he would do, and I think it is quite a direct shot at the credibility of our Auditor General. He reports to this Assembly, and with him conducting a review, it is not a cover-up.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question, Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm ashamed of the Premier even suggesting that. The Auditor General said that he can't do the job that the Premier wants. This is a cover-up, and we all know it.

I'd like to stay on the NovAtel question, to look at this in a little more detail. Albertans have reason to be worried that this government has not been up front with the full extent of the NovAtel fiasco. Buried in this government's announcement of last Thursday was a revelation that the government is continuing to guarantee an additional \$216 million of loans by NovAtel, bringing taxpayer liability for this disaster closer to \$780 million. Now, the government claims that these loans will be paid off, but we've heard that before. The plain bottom line is this: the loan portfolio wasn't good enough to interest the buyers of NovAtel, the private sector. My question to the minister of technology is this: how can the minister justify claiming only half a billion dollars in NovAtel losses when the government is stuck with an additional \$216 million in loans that the private sector would not touch?

MR. STEWART: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not the matter that the private sector would not touch it; it's just that they're not in the financing business, either Northern Telecom or Telexel. The fact is that there are, indeed, amounts that are out there by way of guarantees that back up moneys that are owing to this government. Those moneys are indeed secured by, firstly, the assets that were sold to those subscribers. They are also secured by the shares of the companies that owed moneys to the government. They're also secured by the licences to operate exclusive areas of cellular services in the United States. The amounts have been discounted down. They have been reviewed as closely as possible in order to ensure that every last penny that is outstanding is collectible. It's really no different than a bank that lends money out there saying that those moneys they have loaned are losses. They're not.

We are very confident, Mr. Speaker, that the bottom-line figure that was given at the time of the announcement is indeed a bottom-line figure, and the taxpayers can count on it.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, haven't we heard this before? MagCan, Pocklington, Myrias, GSR: the same old lame arguments.

The bottom line is that the minister can talk about writing down the bad loans all he wants; the fact is that there's still \$216 million that the taxpayers are responsible for. My question to the minister is simply this: if the remaining loans are so good, why was the government unable to sell the loans to the private sector at the same time?

MR. STEWART: They were selling assets of the telecommunications company, and they weren't interested in buying paper.

The amount that is owing, I should point out to the hon. leader, is far more than the \$216 million or \$214 million that it had been discounted down to. The face value of the amount owing is in the neighbourhood of \$300 million, and just out of an abundance of caution in the calculation of this, the discounts were taken and shown only as the \$214 million. But that, in turn, as I indicated,

Mr. Speaker, is fully secured in every way possible in order to ensure that the taxpayers of Alberta will not have to put up with this sort of a charge.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I've heard that we're fully secured in every way possible with MagCan, GSR, Pocklington. That's the point. We've heard it all before. Frankly, we don't believe you, nor do the people of Alberta.

The minister said that they weren't interested in buying paper. I guess not, but certainly I guess we are interested in buying paper. If it's so good then – this is public money again – if these are so well secured, Mr. Speaker, will the minister now reveal the true cost of NovAtel to taxpayers and release detailed information on the loan portfolio to this Assembly?

MR. STEWART: The total cost to the taxpayer, Mr. Speaker, is as indicated at the time of the announcement: \$566 million.

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

MR. DECORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General issued two management letters with respect to NovAtel, one in 1989 and one in 1991. When I spoke to the Auditor General today, he told me that a management letter is a very serious business. It usually identifies problems in management. I also learned from the Auditor General today that the minister responsible for telecommunications was given copies of the 1989 and the 1991 management letters. My first question is to the minister responsible for telecommunications. The evidence seems to be clear, Mr. Minister, that the minister operated independently, that he didn't consult with his cabinet colleagues, that he didn't consult with caucus, that he went off on his own. I'd like to ask why he didn't consult and get a collective position to deal with this most serious matter now affecting all Albertans.

MR. STEWART: Well, Mr. Speaker, when the government had to reacquire NovAtel in order to preserve the integrity of the Telus share offering, we put a management committee in place under the chairmanship of Mr. Bill Grace. It was an eight-member management committee. We gave them a very firm mandate, and that was to refocus and restructure this company and put it in a position where it could either be put on a profitable basis or wound up or sold. At that point in time, the management committee went to work and did in fact restructure in a number of areas that were really important.

Some of those were in the area of systems accounting, and what happened, Mr. Speaker, was that – in fact the hon. leader has made reference to the letters from the Auditor General. I couldn't actually recall having received that copy, so I had my office check, and I received it just before coming to the House. A copy of the letter was received. It went into the hands of Mr. Grace with the instructions that he was to address it.

The Auditor General's report says:

NovAtel's new management has proposed, or taken action to address my recommendations. It is understood that the Province of Alberta is seeking a purchaser for NovAtel.

That's a notation from the Auditor General of Alberta that all those matters have been accounted for and taken care of.

2:50

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, this is extraordinary. The minister is saying that he didn't recall receiving a copy of the management letter. The Auditor General says that a copy as a matter of course

goes to the minister. The minister then says that we gave them a firm mandate. Now, what is it Mr. Minister? It looks like you were operating in the dark. You were not looking at your management letter, and your colleagues didn't know what was going on. When you talk about "we gave them a . . . firm mandate," are you talking about your colleagues, and what was the mandate?

MR. STEWART: Well, whatever the mandate was, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that it worked because the Auditor General has clearly stated: no more problems. His recommendations and his suggestions have been incorporated, and there are the words of the Auditor General to prove it.

MR. DECORE: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think these management letters are critical and crucial, because after the management letters are received by the minister, he gives out more money. The government gives out more money. It's incredible. I would like a commitment from the minister – he's already referred to that management letter – that he'll file both management letters in this Assembly today. Will he give us that commitment?

MR. STEWART: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. leader is in a rut. I've said that whatever was contained in there, whatever the mandate that was given, it's obviously resulted in a total satisfaction of the Auditor General. He can refer to the public document from the Auditor General; the Auditor General's report is a public document.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Cardston.

Constitutional Reform

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. In various polls and in hearings before our Select Special Committee on Constitutional Reform Albertans have been very clear on their position that they would only settle for a full triple E Senate. Mr. Premier, you have reflected those views very clearly in recent comments. During the constitutional meetings that are presently in progress, information is coming forward from them that there is a total of only three provinces that are on side with the triple E Senate concept. Mr. Premier, in view of the solid principles and advantages of this concept for all the provinces and for Confederation, can the Premier advise if we are making any headway with convincing other provinces to come on side?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, there has been, I think, public speculation that there would only be three provinces feeling that a triple E Senate would be worthy of their support. I know that the members of this Assembly and certainly the members of the select committee realize that as the people of Canada and other governments and provinces knew more and more about the triple E Senate, we would be able to convince them of the validity of that proposal.

I'm extremely pleased that as a result of the Western Premiers' Conference last week and the two territorial leaders as well and meetings of our Deputy Premier and Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs with other governments, we were able to just recently have five governments sign on to support the principles of elected, effective, and equal and to then go into details on the effective powers and have a document which has now circulated for all of the current constitutional discussions for all the provinces to consider.

I always felt, Mr. Speaker, that as people realized there was the solid basis for a triple E Senate, more and more of them would endorse it. I'm very pleased that we have been able to get five provinces now endorsing the principles and the details of the effective powers, because that has been one of the more difficult matters to deal with. We have not wanted powers that would gridlock the Parliament of Canada but would represent those provinces that don't have the large majority of population. So we are quite pleased with this progress.

MR. SPEAKER: Cardston, followed by Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary is to the Premier. Under the present constitutional amending formula requiring support of seven provinces having 50 percent of the population, it is imperative that either Ontario or Quebec support the triple E Senate concept. Can the Premier indicate if any progress is being made to bring either or both of those provinces on side?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is going to be, I guess, the difficult challenge. We do recall and I think members will recall that the select committee of the Ontario Legislature did report that they could support an equal Senate depending on the effective powers. We're making progress there, and I hope that the government of Ontario gives very serious consideration to this matter.

Now, as you know, in his visit here recently Premier Bourassa said that they would consider the numbers after they've been able to understand the effective powers. So we are doing everything we possibly can to convince Ontario and Quebec, or either of them but hopefully both of them, of the importance of the triple E Senate. I think the argument, Mr. Speaker, that really does cause them to stop and think – obviously from a recent poll Canadians as a majority support a triple E Senate.

The principle that I make with the Premiers of Ontario and Quebec is this: you already control the House of Commons; do you have to insist on controlling the Senate as well? Must you control not just the House of Commons but also the Senate? Are you so uncertain that a balanced approach in the Senate would be so difficult to live with that you have to control both Houses of our Parliament? I think, Mr. Speaker, that is why Canadians thinking fairly are looking at this matter and saying: "That's right. If they already control the House of Commons, why must they control the Senate as well?" I hope that understanding comes through.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Kingsway.

NovAtel Communications Ltd.
(continued)

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the minister who hasn't resigned yet.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. Hon. member, you address the ministers properly, please.

MR. McEACHERN: To the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications. In last Thursday's news release on the NovAtel sale the minister claimed that the sale of NovAtel would preserve a thousand jobs in Alberta, yet in the same paragraph the release also states, and I quote, that "estimates show the potential for a net job loss of 300 existing positions over time." Will the

minister please explain to Albertans how it is possible to retain a thousand jobs at the same time you're losing 300 jobs when NovAtel only employs 950 people in Alberta in the first place?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to enlighten the hon. member. The release did speak about the preservation of jobs, which was a very important objective for the management committee. It did in fact preserve, as the announcement indicated, a thousand jobs in the cellular and wireless area. That was calculated as follows: approximately 900 jobs at NovAtel were unfortunately reduced by, as the hon. member points out, 300 but preserving 600 and some odd. At the same time, Northern Telecom, which has a switching plant in Calgary, was going to be phasing that out because of changes in technology. Four hundred jobs would have been lost to Calgary and Alberta had this deal not come together with Northern Telecom. Instead of that, they were able to establish a worldwide centre for wireless in Calgary which will employ, as the president of Northern Telecom indicated, approximately 600 and some jobs a year later. So there's the calculation.

3:00

MR. McEACHERN: Mr. Speaker, it sounds to me like Northern Telecom was blackmailing this government and this government gave in.

Why didn't the minister say, and be honest, that we were preserving something like 900 jobs out of 1,300 instead of saying that he's preserving a thousand, as if they were NovAtel jobs? That's exactly the way he worded it. Why didn't you say that?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I think the announcement was very clear. It said that we were preserving 1,000 jobs in the cellular and wireless area, and that's exactly what it is. I think it's important for the people of Alberta and the future of telecommunications in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has asked the Auditor General to do a review of NovAtel, yet the Auditor General's report says that all of his recommendations have been addressed. Now, if that doesn't smell like a cover-up, I don't know what does. My question to the Premier. He's rejected the proposal to have a judicial review. We present another proposal. Will the Premier consider the establishment, the creation of an all-party committee of this Legislature with full investigatory powers to call witnesses, to get papers so that Albertans can get to the bottom of this half billion dollar mess?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed at the hon. member's line of questioning, particularly as he leads in . . . [interjections]

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

MR. GETTY: We listen to their question, Mr. Speaker, and try to answer it, and they won't allow it.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General, as the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications said, did write a management letter. The management committee dealt with his concerns, and then he said that they'd been taken care of. Now, to compare that to the letter and the special duties that I have asked him to conduct with regards to NovAtel, there is no comparison. The

hon. member shouldn't try and say that if the Auditor General has been given these instructions, he is now involved in a cover-up. It's disappointing to hear the hon. member say that about our Auditor General.

Then he says, "an all-party committee" of this Assembly. Well, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is the officer of all parties in this Assembly. He has excellent experience, the talent, the resources to conduct this for the Assembly, and that's exactly what he is doing. The hon. member doesn't seem to understand the import of this letter. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.
Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it were true that the Auditor General were the officer of all members of this Legislature, then all members would have a copy of those management letters, which we don't. So it's true that he's an officer for the government.

Since the Premier is firmly committed on this particular route, will he commit, now that he's had more than 30 minutes to think about it, that is, that when there's a finding of gross negligence in the NovAtel fiasco, heads will roll over there and people will be asked to resign from cabinet?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member is conducting a hypothetical exercise here, and I certainly can't go along with him in terms of trying to guess at the future. I do know that we have a very competent and able Auditor General. I do know that he has the staff and the resources to conduct this exhaustive review which we've asked him to do. We know he's independent. We know he's capable. We know that the report is going to be made public to all the members of this Assembly and all the people of Alberta. Then we'll be able to respond to it.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Glenmore.

Economic Outlook

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very difficult to be on this side of the House and listen to nothing but doom and gloom from members opposite. [interjections] They laugh, but I believe that everybody in Alberta knows that the whole of North America is in a recession. This province is known to be risk-takers, and this is why we still receive support. They take risks in order to create jobs. Recently the Conference Board of Canada, one of the most accurate economic forecasters for Alberta, said that Alberta's model should be applied nationwide with regard to our economy. This is something very significant, and I think that the Minister of Economic Development and Trade should outline to Albertans the importance of our economic strength and why these forecasters are saying this. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order please, hon. members.

MR. McEACHERN: Start with NovAtel.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjection] Thank you, hon. member. [interjection] Order. [interjection] Perhaps some of you would like to count light bulbs or something while you quieten down.

Hon. minister.

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has indicated, we are gratified with the endorsement by the Conference Board of

Canada whereby they have recognized that this government has been in a fistfight to diversify the economy, and the results have been forthcoming as it relates to job creation. We have seen job creation within the province of Alberta over the last number of years. In the recent budget, which the Provincial Treasurer tabled some weeks ago, we are forecasting an additional 15,000 jobs within the province of Alberta, and that is due to the diversification thrusts that we have been involved in resulting in consumer confidence.

Our recent budget came forward with tax reductions for both the individual taxpayer and for our corporate sector. In addition to that, we committed some \$200 million to infrastructure costs for municipalities, which will go a considerable way to job creation. We have been very proud of our job creation figures to date, Mr. Speaker, mainly because of the diversification thrusts advocated by our Premier in forestry, tourism, and high technology. We're going to continue those thrusts, but we're also looking for that broad public input as it relates to the conference that the Premier is chairing this weekend, the conference on our economy, *Toward 2000 Together*.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, jobs are important to the people in Alberta, and our children are graduating from postsecondary education wondering about our economy and whether or not there will be jobs out there for them. Could the minister please elaborate further on whether or not his department is continuing to progress in those areas where our postsecondary graduates would be able to obtain jobs?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, we are working very actively to attract companies that will provide long-term employment, such as Pratt & Whitney, which just recently announced that they are coming to southern Alberta, which will create some 500 direct jobs, offshoots in excess of 400 indirect jobs.

I think it's important that we examine the record as it relates to job creation, recognizing that we do have a responsibility to future Albertans. In 1991 we created close to 15,000 jobs. As I indicated earlier, the budget that was recently tabled by the Provincial Treasurer projects an additional 15,000. Since 1985 we've created in excess of some 120,000 jobs. I would suggest to hon. members that we should compare that to what is taking place in the province of Ontario, which last year alone lost some 160,000 jobs, and on a nationwide basis we have seen a loss last year of some 232,000 jobs. This just underscores our commitment to provide meaningful employment for the young people of this province so that we can continue with a strong economy, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View.

AGT Privatization

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NovAtel fiasco is the most spectacular tax-supported business loss in any province in Canada. The minister talks about a fistfight. They're knocked out on the floor over there. Maybe that's why the minister of technology on Friday tried to fool Albertans by saying that the privatization of AGT got 1 and a half billion dollars of loans and guarantees off the backs of taxpayers, yet the public accounts clearly show that in fact this government is still on the hook for \$1.2 billion in loan guarantees. I'd like to ask the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications: will he explain why he made the statement to the Assembly on Friday that taxpayers were off the hook for loans and guarantees when

the public accounts clearly show that the taxpayers in fact are still guaranteeing over a billion dollars of Telus's long-term debt?

3:10

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, the guarantees still remain in place, but the debt, in fact, that did exist, that was outstanding was paid off.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, this government's statements just can't be believed, aren't credible any more.

Telus Corporation's 1991 annual report shows that since it was privatized, they've cut their capital expenditures by nearly 30 percent and plan to continue holding down capital spending in 1992. This government always said that they privatized AGT so they'd have the flexibility to increase capital spending to stay competitive. Given this evidence, Mr. Speaker, will the minister now admit that the whole case for the privatization of AGT was faulty and misleading and that statements from this government can't be believed?

MR. STEWART: Definitely no, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

Cold Lake Area Water Levels

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a meeting organized by the community advisory committee on the Cold Lake heavy oil project yesterday, the ministers of the Environment and Agriculture were told of lakes which have dropped more than four feet in their water levels, of creeks which have run dry, and groundwater wells which have run dry as well. Despite the best efforts of some of the people in the industry to blame all of this on Mother Nature, the fact is that these water conditions are unprecedented, even during the drought conditions of the hungry '30s. Now, I'd like to ask the minister specifically about the long-term water management plan for the region which was tabled by the government in 1985, which followed a five-year comprehensive study, a task force review, and promises that the oil industry would be off local water supply by 1991 at the latest. I would like to ask why his department continued and continues to allow Esso and others to draw water in the face of overwhelming evidence that this is harming agriculture, tourism, and the environment too.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, indeed there was a meeting of the community advisory committee in Bonnyville yesterday, and those members of the committee expressed the concerns outlined by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place. With respect to his specific question, when the pipeline from the North Saskatchewan River to supply water for heavy oil operations was proposed, there were about 20 operators proposing to tie into that particular line. The economics of the situation have changed dramatically since that time, and indeed we have one or two operators now drawing water, mostly groundwater, since they have been cut off from drawing water at this particular time from Cold Lake.

We're doing a reassessment of that pipeline. A task force has been set up. It consists of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, the hon. Minister of Energy, and myself, and we're looking at all the documentation relative to the 1985 studies. We're doing a complete review, and in terms of developing a long-range program it will be up to a complete review and a complete overhaul of the studies that have taken place to date.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I had the impression that the local citizens wanted to tie into the Minister of Agriculture as much as anything, but the Minister of the Environment came to the

meeting, and he did promise a task force and another study. What happened here is that we had a five-year study and a task force, and the government ignored it. So I would simply like to ask the minister, with all of his talk about a \$200 million management plan down the road, how he can expect to be taken seriously when the government ignored the last study, ignored the last task force, and then violated its own management plan.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's unfair to say that we ignored the last study. As I explained, the economics have changed dramatically since 1985, when there were about 20 companies wanting to tie into a pipeline from the North Saskatchewan River. We are still looking at a pipeline. Indeed, we believe that a pipeline is the ultimate solution. In the meantime there is the question of sustaining an industry in an area that is severely depressed at this particular time and at the same time protecting the environment.

We have taken steps, Mr. Speaker, to protect the environment and still sustain Esso's operations. We have cut them off completely from use of water from Cold Lake. We're now examining the whole subject. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss an application for a groundwater licence that is currently under consideration by the director of water resources. What I have undertaken to do is take the information that was presented to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and myself at that meeting, provide that information to the director of water resources without fettering his discretion in any way, shape, or form, providing that information in the hopes that he may be able to make a valued and honest decision relative to his consideration of the licence.

NovAtel Communications Ltd.

(continued)

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, no one believes the Treasurer when he says that he's getting \$78 million for the sale of NovAtel. To the Mr. Fixit of this of this cabinet – and one would have to wonder of course what would have happened if he hadn't fixed it: how can the Treasurer claim that he's getting \$78 million when \$12 million of this amount is for a research facility that's being built by Northern Telecom for its own use and when \$20 million of this is deferred payments over five years, secured by nothing more than a \$3 million deposit?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, full details with respect to that were given at the announcement, and it's too bad the hon. member didn't take the opportunity to look into it. The amount of \$12 million was in fact invested in Alberta to establish a centre of excellence in research and development. I think that its initial employment will be in the neighbourhood of 55 people who will in turn operate in the wireless area, bring expertise in research and development in that very important area.

MR. MITCHELL: So every time a company in Alberta builds a building, it's money in the government's pocket.

Once we take out the \$12 million, once we discount the \$20 million to today's value, once we cut away all of the minister's rhetoric that we've heard today, why will the minister not admit that he didn't get \$78 million for the sale of NovAtel at all, that he maybe got \$61 million or \$62 million if he was lucky?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, again, nobody is trying to fool anybody about the nature of that deal. All of these details about the research centre for excellence, the payment – and he's quite right. Some of it is payable over a period of five years, a minimum of \$20 million, or 25 percent.

MR. MITCHELL: It's a new concept to . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, hon. member. You asked your question.

MR. STEWART: Nobody is trying to fool anybody. It's all there; it's there for the public of Alberta to see. I think that given the circumstances of the company at the time, notwithstanding the fact that we don't hold this up as a great and glorious type of transaction, it is the best that could be achieved by that management committee in the circumstances. I think it has some very important long-term benefits for Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Lesser Slave Lake.

Lesser Slave Lake

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most members of the Legislature, I'm sure, are aware of the most beautiful all-enclosed lake in the province of Alberta, Lesser Slave Lake, otherwise called the jewel of the north. Every spring for approximately one week biologists in Lesser Slave Lake do measuring, clipping, sexing, and milking of eggs from the walleye at the Grouard channel, and we want that scientific activity to continue. However, there is grave concern regarding the long-term health of the Lesser Slave Lake spawn because of the low, low levels of Lesser Slave Lake. Would the Minister of the Environment provide any information on any efforts being made to ensure that the lake can be managed to make sure that it continues to be the northern playground of Alberta?

3:20

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have, believe me, as much concern for Lesser Slave Lake as I do for Cold Lake and the water problems they're facing there. I find the hon. member's question a very interesting one indeed, because here you have a lake that is going down in terms of water volume yet not being affected by the heavy oil industry. So it does indeed indicate that nature is playing a tremendous role in these problems, and some of the problems, of course, relate to man-made situations.

Very simply we're currently carrying out a water quality survey on Lesser Slave Lake and its tributaries for a comprehensive list of parameters to address this problem. One of the problems over the years has been a sort of band-aid approach to the waters feeding Lesser Slave Lake, and what we want to do is put in place a comprehensive program that is going to make sure that the lake levels are preserved and stabilized for all time.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm always pleased to know that we have some really large projects or at least some activity going on to ensure that we do have stability as we go in terms of water management.

One area that always gets brought back to me is the fact that people are concerned that there may be pollutants going into Lesser Slave Lake. Could the minister please ensure that we can get some activity in terms of long-term water management plans to make pollutants not get into Lesser Slave Lake?

MR. KLEIN: Well, it can't be solely the responsibility of government. First of all, we have to get all the stakeholders involved, and we have to get those people to take some responsibility for the amount of pollutants they are personally responsible for. This means the agricultural community, the people who have cottages on the lake, the people who farm along the rivers, the tributaries, and so that feed the lake, and the Alberta government.

We have to acknowledge some of the mistakes that we made 30, 40 years ago. Believe me; when you start to straighten out a riverbed channel to solve a problem upstream, the one thing we found out for sure is that you create another problem downstream. What we need to do – and we are doing this right now; we have a task force and working committees in place – is to bring all the stakeholders together, come up with a comprehensive plan, and hopefully find the dollars to implement that plan.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Calder.

Child Welfare

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in the Assembly the Minister of Family and Social Services expressed his respect for the Children's Advocate and then went on to say that the serious weaknesses within the child welfare system that were expressed in the recent annual report by the Children's Advocate were in fact not even happening. The Children's Advocate calls on the minister as well as the Attorney General's department to resolve the critical issue within child welfare of massive delays in decision-making because the delays may mean that a child will never be reunited with their families or may never be adopted. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: given that these serious delays are literally ruining many children's lives, when is this minister, along with the Attorney General, going to act on the strong recommendation of the Children's Advocate to ensure that there is more aggressive planning for these children so that permanent relationships can be established as soon as possible?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, I reiterate the commitment and appreciation I have for our Children's Advocate. In response to the specific question, I can assure the member that the moment I received that report, I made sure that we began to implement the recommendations of the Children's Advocate. I can also say that the report is somewhat dated by the time it comes forward and is tabled and that we had acted on many of the recommendations within that report. I can say that we share the member's concern, that we're doing all we can to step up permanency of children that come into care. The member knows that we've added substantive numbers of child welfare workers, that we've reshifted our focus in terms of the existing personnel that were in place. I acted just as soon as I received that report.

MS MJOLSNESS: Mr. Speaker, it would be very helpful if the minister could be forthcoming with some specifics about what he is doing to address some of these issues. We don't have that. Another serious concern raised within the report was the fact that presently children's cases are not regularly monitored to review the progress that's being made towards permanency placement. I'd like to ask the minister: can he be specific then? If he's making progress in all these areas, what progress has he made, then, to implement a monitoring system that would ensure a more successful permanent placement for these children?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, I was very specific in my answer last time, and I'll be specific in my answer again this time. I told the member that in response to the concerns raised by the Children's Advocate, we have implemented a number of changes. We have added frontline workers. We have improved upon the automation that we had in place in terms of the information that we need to be able to keep on these children. We have, as a result of the Children's Advocate's recommendation, put in a quality

assurance process that allows us now to monitor these files on an ongoing and a very regular basis.

We are working very quickly and very efficiently to respond to the kinds of concerns and issues and suggestions that the Children's Advocate brings forward. We want to do what's best for these children. I pay very close attention not only to what the Children's Advocate has to share with this government as it relates to advice but also to foster parents. The member knows again, if she wants specifics, that we have restructured our foster parent program in this province in consultation with the Alberta Foster Parent Association to respond to the needs of those children.

We have, as I said earlier, automated and made some significant changes there. We have added staff and made significant changes there. We have put in a workload model, Mr. Speaker, that's the envy of the nation. Very, very significant progress has been made as it relates to child welfare in this province.

Privilege Access to Information

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Glengarry, on a purported point of privilege.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of privilege, and I quote Standing Order 15(1) and Standing Order 15(5), *Beauchesne* 25, *Beauchesne* 114(1), *Beauchesne* 115, and *Beauchesne* 118. The question of privilege arises out of the questions that I put to the hon. minister responsible for telecommunications during question period and specifically deal with the issue concerning the tabling forthwith of the management letters that the Auditor General has provided to the minister responsible for telecommunications.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to start by reading Standing Order 15:

(1) A breach of the rights of the Assembly or of any member constitutes a question of privilege.

(5) A member may always raise a question of privilege in the Assembly immediately after the words are uttered or the events occur that give rise to the question.

Beauchesne 115:

A question of privilege must be brought to the attention of the House at the first possible opportunity.

Beauchesne 114:

(1) It is customary for questions of privilege arising during the Question Period and those for which notice has been given to be considered at the conclusion of the Question Period.

(2) A complaint of a breach of privilege must conclude with a motion providing the House with an opportunity to take some action.

I've filed with the Clerk a copy of that motion.

Mr. Speaker, the matter of privilege relates to what I consider to be critical documents that pertain to the NovAtel financial mess that Albertans now face, a \$566 million loss that Albertans must make good. There are two management letters. We're told by the Auditor General that he issued a management letter in 1989 and a second management letter in 1991. The Auditor General has informed me that as a matter of course the minister responsible receives a copy of the management letter. Although it took him a little while, the minister has acknowledged that he has received these management letters.

3:30

I think it's important for us to take note of what the Premier said in this Assembly just moments ago, and that is that the Auditor General is an officer of this Legislative Assembly. The Auditor General is not the private auditor of the minister responsible for telecommunications, he is not the private auditor for the cabinet, and he is not the private auditor for the government. He

is the Auditor General for this Legislative Assembly. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the Auditor General Act section 3, it quotes what the Premier said, that the Auditor General is an officer of the Assembly. It says then in sections 18 and 19 . . .

MR. JOHNSTON: Get to the point. No one is paying you by the hour.

MR. DECORE: This is not a funny matter, Mr. Treasurer. This is a matter involving \$566 million that you and your colleagues are responsible for losing.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

MR. JOHNSTON: Get to the point. You're talking about nothing.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order please, both sides of the House.

Please continue, Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, section 18 of the Auditor General Act says that at the end of each fiscal period "the Auditor General shall report to the Assembly." Section 19: "report to the . . . Assembly." Under section 17(2): a special report as requested by the Premier. If you look at section 20(2), it says that after that special report is done, the Auditor General must submit the report to the chairman of the select standing committee. Everything is done through these sections to show that the Auditor General reports to the Assembly and not to a minister.

There is one section, Mr. Speaker, that I think needs to be looked at by you and by, I would suggest, the lawyers that give you assistance. That section says as follows:

The Auditor General shall as soon as practicable advise the appropriate officers or employees of a department, Provincial agency or Crown-controlled organization of any matter discovered in his examinations that, in the opinion of the Auditor General, is material to the operation of the department, Provincial agency or Crown-controlled organization, and shall as soon as practicable advise the Treasurer of any of those matters that, in the opinion of the Auditor General, are material to the exercise or performance of the Treasurer's powers and duties.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if you review the Blues, the Speaker will note that my questions were specific in this sense to the questions that were put to the minister of telecommunications: did he consult with his cabinet colleagues? His response was that "we" issued a mandate. Here's the wording: "We gave them a . . . firm mandate." That answer was specific to the question that I put, and that related to whether the cabinet itself had dealt with this management letter situation. The response was that "We gave them a . . . firm mandate."

My view is that the laws of our province are being breached in the sense that you could extend section 28 of the Auditor General Act to allow the minister responsible to get this information by calling him "an appropriate officer of a department," but this does not include "we"; that is, the members of cabinet that gave a firm mandate to NovAtel or to whomever to deal with the management letters. The laws of this province are supposed to apply to everyone fairly, equally, appropriately. They can't be in some way skewed to be used as the private area of a minister or a cabinet or anybody else. That is what will happen if, Mr. Speaker, you rule that there isn't a question of privilege, because it will allow the minister to consult with his cabinet colleagues to extend way beyond what section 28 of the Auditor General's Act provides for and to give advantage to members of this Assembly that other

members of this Assembly do not have advantage in having. That affects the right of the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry and every other member of this Assembly to properly get to the truth of the matters that are being pursued and questions to elicit and provide truth.

Those management letters that the minister himself stands up and uses are now critical in knowing about in the sense of knowing the full story for this Assembly and knowing specifically for members so that they can pursue the truth through questions and know exactly why this \$566 million loss occurred. Was it only the responsibility of the minister of telecommunications? Was he the only one making those decisions, or was it the cabinet as a whole? What's the story?

Mr. Speaker, my rights as a member of this Assembly are affected. I'm not able to pursue the truth by these documents being hidden. I invite the Speaker to review the Blues and to, I think, come to the conclusion that my rights as a member of this Assembly have been breached and that we should then go to the next step and that is to have a motion that this matter be dealt with by a select committee of this House.

Thank you.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I've listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry as he referenced Standing Order 15. I'm in somewhat of a dilemma because from my point of view I do not understand how, with reference to his argument, anybody's rights have been abridged, either those of an individual or those of the House. Under Standing Order 15(6) I know that you're only too eager to listen to the various points of view with regard to the member's claim. I do not for the life of me understand where these rights have been abridged, and I wish you well in your finding.

MR. SPEAKER: Additional?

MR. McEACHERN: Mr. Speaker, the minister quoted a document and should table it in the Legislature. If he does that, then I don't know whose privileges have been breached.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair will need to check the Blues, because at one stage there was a concern in the flurry of question period as to whether or not some copy of some document had already been a matter of public record, and without being in a position to double-check that at this time, the Chair will have to hold onto the matter until tomorrow.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**
Standing Committee Vacancy

18. Moved by Mr. Stewart:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 53(2) the Member for Bow Valley, Mr. Musgrove, be appointed to fill the vacancy on the following standing committees of the Assembly:

- (1) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing,
- (2) Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and
- (3) Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.

[Motion carried]

Adjournment from May 27 to June 4

19. Moved by Mr. Stewart:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Wednesday, May 27, 1992, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned to Thursday, June 4, 1992, at 2:30 p.m.

[Motion carried]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The committee will come to order.

head: **Main Estimates 1992-93**

3:40

Executive Council

MR. CHAIRMAN: These estimates commence at page 151 of the large book with the elements commencing at page 57 in the elements book. Vote 1 is Executive Council Administration.

Does the hon. Premier wish to discuss those?

MR. GETTY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just open with a few remarks, and then I'll ask each of the members responsible for various expenditures in the Executive Council to very briefly give some information regarding their responsibilities.

Now, while under Executive Council it does show the Solicitor General for Professions and Occupations, I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore to make comments there. Under the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, I'd ask the Member for Red Deer-North to comment for those responsibilities.

I would express disappointment, regrets from the hon. minister responsible for native programs. Talking to him today, he is chairing a constitutional meeting and is unable to be with us, and I think members would recognize that.

Under the Northern Alberta Development Council, Mr. Chairman, I'll ask the Member for Grande Prairie to describe for us the very important responsibilities that he carries out there. There may be some comments from the hon. minister responsible for the Northern Alberta Development Council. If he has any, I'm sure the members would be glad to hear them.

The Minister of Energy will report regarding the Energy Resources Conservation Board.

I'd just point out for members as well that the hon. Member for Whitecourt, the minister responsible for Occupational Health and Safety, has already had estimates before the House. Questions could be asked here, and he is available.

The Attorney General, as the minister responsible for the Public Service Employee Relations Board, would also be prepared to respond to any questions. If he isn't in the House when they are raised, he will take the responsibility for getting replies.

Mr. Chairman, when you look at the broad area in which the Executive Council has responsibilities, I tried to think of some matters that the members would be interested in on a broader or general basis that have taken a lot of Executive Council time. It seemed to me there were three matters that have certainly taken a lot of consideration and a lot of time of Executive Council members that I could talk about with the members today. They might want to respond to them or raise other matters, and we'll do the best we can to answer their questions or respond to their comments.

I thought, Mr. Chairman, I should just say a word about the unprecedented degree of consultation which is being carried out between the government and the people of our province, perhaps

even to the extent where members of the public are saying, "Enough; you are asking us so many questions; there are so many hearings, so many public meetings," almost to the point that they don't have time to respond to everything that the government is asking. However, I think it is an important feature of public life these days that we have as great an opportunity for public input into matters as possible, and I'd just touch on a few of them for the hon. members so they realize just how much is being done.

As we know, on the Constitution we had the select committee which went through the province holding meetings, listening to Albertans. We felt that that was a problem with the Meech Lake accord. There weren't enough opportunities for people to express themselves prior to negotiating the Meech Lake accord, and we wanted to make sure that in this case that didn't happen again. Therefore, there were extensive public hearings, meetings, discussions, letters, briefs, and we ended up with, of course, the select committee report, which is the foundation for the constitutional matters we're discussing now.

In terms of electoral boundaries we've had two groups go through the province – first, our select committee and, secondly, our Electoral Boundaries Commission – on obviously a very difficult matter, trying to restructure boundaries based on the growth of our province and the way people move about the province. We still have that problem before us, but while it is a problem, there has certainly been extensive public input.

Mr. Chairman, we had considerable numbers of meetings with all the key groups in the agriculture industry. We knew they were hurting, having problems. You will recall that our meeting with the people, the key leaders of groups in agriculture, resulted in the government coming out with an agricultural package to help that industry in the fall of last year.

The Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families has conducted hearings all across the province. The Member for Red Deer-North may well give us additional information on that in the course of his comments.

The Premier's council on persons with disabilities has also been conducting consultation and input all across the province.

We met with members of the energy industry at great length, and that resulted in the energy industry assistance package, which was also introduced last fall. I think that along with the agriculture package, the energy industry package helped. It didn't solve all the problems, but it certainly helped.

The Natural Resources Conservation Board, the Minister of the Environment is responsible for it. The board is holding meetings across the province. I think that initiative of a Natural Resources Conservation Board to partner the Energy Resources Conservation Board is in fact turning out to be a very helpful, useful tool for the public in providing input on major resource developments.

Mr. Chairman, the Water Resources Commission is holding hearings as well across the province.

In the whole area of the provincial economy looking ahead to the year 2000, we have had superb meetings across the province with focus groups, with public input, and that culminates with the Toward 2000 conference in Calgary commencing on Wednesday night and then going on to Thursday and Friday of this week. I'm really looking forward to the input from the public there, because this, of course, will lead to the new economic blueprint for this province towards the year 2000.

I hardly need to tell members that there was unprecedented consultation on our environmental legislation. I guess it's been some two years since the minister started the process of consulting with the people of Alberta, and it has led to the legislation which is before the House now.

I only make this point, Mr. Chairman, because sometimes when we're going through these consultative processes, members tend

to lose track of the amount. I think I've probably missed a couple, and someone would point out to me some other detailed consultations that we've had, but I thought from an Executive Council basis that it's good to take an overview to see if the government is living up to its commitment of complete public input on important matters. I think in this case members would agree that we are.

Mr. Chairman, the other matter which has taken a lot of our attention in the last year and will in the future is Alberta's economy. The people of Alberta for some period of time were able to withstand the recession that hit North America. Certainly the rest of Canada and the United States were badly hurt. For quite a period of time it wasn't impacting on our province with a great deal of impact, but I think it's fair to say that last fall we started to feel that Albertans were losing their sense of optimism and their positive outlook to the future. It was something that started to be felt in small businesses, retail shops, and all across our province. The consumer while still having dollars to spend was not spending them, and people were not investing with the optimism and confidence that they had in the past. I think it was the fact that this recession, which is so different from any others, had started to turn around. We thought we were coming out of it in the fall, and then the new growth of our economy collapsed again in Canada, and that hit Alberta as well.

3:50

I as President of the Executive Council attended three First Ministers' Conferences on the Canadian Economy inside of three months. I think we set in place in those first ministers' meetings a sense of co-operation that should really help us in the future, whether it's in interprovincial trade, whether it's in governments focusing their policies all in the same direction, or whether it's a matter of our budgets. The first ministers, I think in a feeling of co-operation, were tackling the issues that were impacting on our economy. That led to the federal budget, and as you know, Mr. Chairman, the federal government cut taxes to consumers and cut taxes to the manufacturing and processing parts of corporate taxes.

Now, I think it was significant that in our budgets there were problems last year and this year with what I refer to as the second energy price shock of the last six and a half years. The first one was oil, when the price dropped from some \$35 to \$11, \$12 in a few months. That was the price shock that hit us in 1986. The second price shock is the dropping natural gas prices, which impacted on our budget last year and our budget this year. I think all members in fairness would say that it was a dramatic loss of revenues from this price drop in natural gas that has hurt the Alberta budget.

Nevertheless, we, co-operating with the federal government, felt we would do something that, unfortunately, other provinces didn't do. We passed on the full federal tax cut both on a corporate basis and on a personal tax basis in order to let the dollars flow through to Albertans to try and stimulate our economy. In addition to that, we reduced our own personal taxation levels – we cut personal taxes by 1 percent – and we cut corporate taxes in the manufacturing and processing areas as well. Again, in a difficult year of dropping revenues, intended to pass on dollars to the public and our businesses so that they could try and turn around the economy and their personal businesses and stimulate economic development. We don't see that happening yet in any substantial way. I think our arguments with the federal government about having interest rates drop finally were accepted. They have dropped dramatically as has inflation, and I think you can see housing turning around, but I don't yet feel that the general economy is coming back the way we'd like to see it.

One of the things that I think hasn't gotten enough attention is the western economic partnership program where various departments in our government are co-operating with the federal government to help stimulate the economy. I hope that in the coming days in this Assembly we can focus more on those initiatives and hope we can see them starting to work in the economy.

Mr. Chairman, the economy is so important, yet for a variety of reasons we haven't been able – and I haven't as Premier – always to spend the time on it that I would like and on other responsibilities of the Executive Council because we have spent so much time in the area of the Canadian Constitution. That would be the third general topic I just would like to mention.

As members know, but I think it's helpful to reflect back on it, in 1981 and '82 we patriated the Constitution but did it with a massive flaw. It did not include the province of Quebec. I think we've continued to live with that problem. I know that those who were leaders, first ministers, in 1981 and '82 are now reflecting back on this and saying they probably made a mistake. Well, whether they did or not, hindsight is always 20/20 vision, but I do know that because of that flaw in 1981 and '82, we have had to spend a lot of time on the Constitution. Members know that we tried to patch up that flaw in 1987. We tried very hard. As a matter of fact, in 1990 at the constitutional conference I appreciated the help of the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Party at the Meech Lake discussions trying to put together a solution. Now, we failed. We failed as first ministers and as governments. The Meech Lake accord failed, and it left the continuing flaw in our constitutional package.

Well, that only meant that we had to try again, and it's fair to say, Mr. Chairman, that we are again going through the agonies and the challenges of putting together a constitutional package. We're having intergovernmental meetings. If members are watching the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, in his travels, he and members of his department and to some extent our Minister of Municipal Affairs responsible for native matters are spending unprecedented amounts of time trying to work together in putting a constitutional package back in place.

Now, this is the Canada round, and therefore it's a round when the focus is not just on Quebec but rather we focus on the needs all across Canada. That is why the extensive consultation is going on between governments. I'm not sure, Mr. Chairman, at this stage when this will all come together. The federal government has put in place a deadline, if you want to call it that, that they would hope by the end of this month. Well, this is May 25; we are very close. It may well be that there will be a first ministers' meeting in the first week of June. If that's the case, I would once again consider whether the Leader of the Opposition or the leader of the Liberal Party would feel that their previous experience was helpful, and if they comment on the matter, I would certainly consider again whether it would be wise for the leaders of three parties from this Legislature go to a constitutional meeting. I know that it can be frustrating if it goes on and on as it did last time, and nobody came prepared for a seven-day meeting, but I think the importance of the matter would make us commit all of the time and resources that we have to try and solve this constitutional issue.

We talked about it a little bit today in the question period, about the way people are starting to come on to the triple E Senate feature that Alberta feels so firmly about. I think it's fair to say that the Senate reform feature is now coming to be one of the major issues of this constitutional package. I think back, Mr. Chairman, and you would know this; it wasn't that long ago when

Alberta broke new ground in an unprecedented way and actually conducted a Senate election. I remember when I used talk about Senate reform and talk about electing Senators and how lonely it was in those days. Now it's so significant how we have change in the public's mind and in governments' minds. We now have taken completely for granted, I think, that we will have an elected Senate, when just several years ago everyone said, "No, you can't do that." So we have made progress there. Five provinces are now supporting the feature of an elected, effective, and equal Senate. That is, I think, a remarkable improvement, remarkable progress, and I hope we're able to push all the way through. Certainly that's my intent. I feel so strongly about this matter, and our caucus and government feel so strongly about it, and I hope the people of Alberta are with us completely in insisting on a triple E Senate in these negotiations.

4:00

Mr. Chairman, I raise this only to get members ready. I think sometime in the first two weeks of June, perhaps the first week of June, this whole matter will culminate in very intensive constitutional negotiations to try and have a package presumably before Canada Day, July 1 of this year. That's something to be hoped for. The Alberta government position is: the number one priority, a united country; second, to have Quebec in Canada; third, that a key part of the package must be the triple E Senate, Senate reform.

Mr. Chairman, I've touched on some general responsibilities of the Executive Council. I've tried to just highlight two or three that have taken a lot of my attention and the cabinet's attention over the past year and will in the coming year, and I'd now like to invite the Member for Calgary-Glenmore to comment on the matter of the Professions and Occupations Bureau in the coming year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Glenmore.

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Premier; you certainly have given me a challenging job.

This is vote 8 of Executive Council. The estimates of the Professions and Occupations Bureau are noted on page 169 in the amount of \$1,070,000. This is a 3.9 decrease from last year's estimates.

Mr. Chairman, our government places a great deal of importance on the sound regulation of professions and occupations and has been looked up to as a leader right across Canada in this area. Members of these regulated groups make up a significant portion of Alberta's work force. Regulation is important to ensure that the public is not placed at risk and quality services are provided. Wherever possible regulated professions and occupations in Alberta are given the privilege of delegated self-government. For the most part this system has served the public and the professions well to continue on this structure.

On behalf of the government and all Albertans I want to recognize the hundreds of individuals who generously have volunteered their time to be effective in governing professional interests. This is done in a consultative manner that the Premier has already alluded to and has worked extremely well.

As with all organizations that have been delegated the power relating to public responsibility, professional associations are being challenged to respond to great demands and expectations from the public. The people of Alberta have high expectations and are pressing professional associations to exercise the privilege of self-governance with more diligence, accountability, and transparency. The bureau and professional associations recognize this legitimate public demand and will continue to place a high priority on

improving in this area. I'd just like to take a moment to thank all of the staff of the Professions and Occupations Bureau.

In 1990 I tabled in the Assembly the paper Principles and Policies Governing Professional Legislation in Alberta. This policy requires a great deal of change to professional governance. Both of these measures in discipline and public representation on regulatory governing councils will improve public accountability. Many of the professional associations have embraced these changes, but some of them have been reluctant to accept them. We're continuing to work with these groups and have great confidence in the system to serve them. Professional legislation to ensure that minimum standards exist for professional qualifications, ethics, and practice is required.

Mr. Chairman, there are legitimate concerns relating to recognizing credentials of foreign-trained individuals and to the overlapping of often existing scopes of practice, and this the bureau will be addressing very shortly. A task force examined the issue of foreign-credentialing, and a report will be tabled very shortly. We are continuing to carry on the work with individuals who are trained outside of Alberta and our country.

In the coming year the important work of the Health Disciplines Board will also continue. A regulatory framework for midwifery will be developed as well as standards for specific groups. The bureau's work force planning unit will continue for another year so that accurate information about our supply in health and social service personnel is collected.

I think, Mr. Chairman, since there are so many speakers, I will just say that the bureau will ensure that the public's interest is kept in the forefront and that I'll be here to answer any questions.

Thank you.

Point of Order Speaking Time

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, a point of order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud on a point of order.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to get some clarification as to how long all the speakers will go, because the last time we went through this exercise with Executive Council, we were shut out of the door completely. We ran out of time because all the time was burned up. Are you going to cut them off at 4:30?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we're going to aim for that. We'll aim for the most expeditious way of handling this. The Chair would ask all ministers and others reporting on these estimates to be as brief as possible.

Debate Continued

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Culture and Multi-culturalism.

MR. MAIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll endeavour to be brief, and I'll endeavour as well to answer some of the questions that I know already are on the mind of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud as I make my remarks here.

Twenty years ago, Mr. Chairman, the current President of Executive Council had ministerial responsibilities that saw him signing an order in council that brought into existence the Public Affairs Bureau. The bureau has had a proud history of 20 years of doing a variety of service for government and for the people of Alberta. It has three main objectives. One is to assist the citizens in Alberta in getting the information about government that they need, also to provide effective communication services to govern-

ment, and as well to procure and make sure that there's a fair and equitable means of handling the services such as audiovisual and printing that government buys in this area, that that is done in a fair and equitable manner.

Mr. Chairman, we are in a time of restraint and squeezing of government expenditures, and the Public Affairs Bureau is of course no exception. We've tried to streamline our operations and become more efficient and more effective to reflect more adequately and better represent the current contemporary needs both of government and of the people of Alberta. During the past year we conducted a service-needs study, and the estimates that are presented today in vote 9 in the Executive Council estimates reflect the results of that study. We've made some changes in the way operations are conducted, and we've changed some of the things that we're doing.

I might take just a minute to describe some of the services that the Public Affairs Bureau does provide that aren't generally well known. One, of course, is the RITE service, the telephone system that's been set up: 59 operators in 35 centres across the province. As a result of the RITE line being in place, it's estimated that Albertans save \$2.8 million annually in their ability to make phone calls to government, and the government itself has an internal savings of about a million dollars on saved long-distance toll charges. We also publish and sell a number of government documents: legislative Acts, statutes, regulations, and so on. We have a provincial film library that loaned out 8,000 films last year.

Into the areas of our responsibilities that are more familiar. We provide communications professionals to government departments. We've got 85 individuals working through the bureau in various departments. Of course, we're also responsible for purchasing services from the private sector: advertising, print, graphic design, and so on.

Part of our new structure, as I alluded to, as we become more efficient and more reflective of contemporary needs, is a new communications planning section. It better co-ordinates governmentwide communications and is investigating better ways to communicate and consult with Albertans, Mr. Chairman, but we have reallocated funds from within the bureau to make this happen. Our budget request is \$11.8 million. This is a decrease from last year's estimates of 3.3 percent. We are down in terms of our positions by 10. We had 223 in our last budget estimates, and we have 213 today.

4:10

Mr. Chairman, the change in the communications planning section resulted in three written questions that were on the Order Paper, and the government accepted them on May 12. The questions were all asked by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

"How is the \$528,088 allocated to Communications Planning . . . going to be spent?" Well, Mr. Chairman, I have the detailed breakdown here:

\$312,088 [for] 5 permanent positions; \$75,000 for freelance writers and editors; \$108,500 for private sector contracts such as media monitoring and clipping services . . . and \$31,500 for supplies and administrative costs.

This funding was allocated from decreases in other areas.

"What does the term 'communications planning' mean?" Well, I've described that. It's a reorganization, and the establishment of this section was part of that restructuring. We're improving the co-ordination of communications across government. Albertans tell us that they need more information about government, and that's the object of the communications planning section.

"Why is there a 393 percent increase in the budget allocation?" Well, communications planning is a new section, and therefore

there appears to be a large increase when, in fact, funding for this allocation was reallocated or offset by decreases in other areas, and the overall budget has decreased by 3.3 percent.

Mr. Chairman, I'll file with the committee and thus with the Assembly the answers to those written questions that were accepted on May 12.

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

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have the difficult task of being limited to just a few minutes to talk about what should be taking a few hours in terms of the incredibly good work that's been going on around the province with a whole lot of Albertans as related to the Premier's council on the family. I just want to preface my remarks by thanking the Premier again not just for his commitment and vision as far as to Alberta families, but that when this council was struck, he indicated this was going to be an arm's-length council free to be able to do the types of things that the council felt should be done and advise the government in ways that the council felt the advice should happen. The Premier has certainly kept to that commitment, and this council has been able to operate at arm's length and in response to Alberta citizens.

I'll very quickly cover some of the things we've undertaken as we approach our second anniversary date, and so in less than two short years.

One of the first things we did was recognize that not only are there government departments, of course, that are working with families, but there are many, many nongovernmental organizations that work with families throughout this province, yet they didn't have a network among themselves. So we took upon ourselves the task of organizing those nongovernmental organizations, NGOs, as I'll refer to them, to find out who they were and where they were and get together with them. We've pulled them together and formed a network so that they can see among themselves what they're doing provincewide. They could tell us how they feel government programming is working and what they could be doing better than possibly could be happening through the government area, where redundancy could be reduced, and where co-ordination could be improved. We've had a number of meetings with those groups and have allowed them to organize into a network where they can communicate among themselves.

I'd like to announce at this point that the community consultation process is now completed. That was a process that was begun shortly after the Lieutenant Governor's conference on the family. As stated, it was the ambitious task of going through a number of communities in the province and hearing from Albertans in terms of what they thought should be happening as related to government and government programming and families. I'm happy to report today to the Premier and to my colleagues here that that process is complete. Nineteen different communities were visited, and the process worked on the individual communities using guidelines from the family council and using a criteria checklist of pulling people together. These are the grass roots of these communities working together.

To the Premier and to the other members, I can tell you that there were over 3,000 Albertans who were involved, and I don't mean just a short-term stepping up to a microphone and talking for a couple of minutes. They had to commit themselves to a day or an evening of in-depth discussions on what they thought about the programming and about the Alberta government and its effect on families. We've pulled that report together. It is going to be released in a matter of days, and Albertans will see what was talked about. From there the council will be moving to prioritize the things that were said and bring the first action requests to the

government. So that's been a very significant and ambitious process. I want to thank the different agencies, organizations, the FCSS groups, the many people who took it upon themselves in their communities to pull this together.

The development of the Family Policy Grid, of course, is complete, and that is a compilation of eight principles – the council having had input from various organizations and individuals, academics from around the province over the last year and a half – that should govern and guide every government program and every government policy. This particular grid is unique in all of Canada. After three departments having piloted this grid, we have met with deputy ministers in a policy orientation session and heard from the three departments that already have piloted the grid. We have the commitment of the ministers, the deputies in terms of applying this grid as a mirror or a checklist on government programs and policies to see exactly how these programs are affecting families and do the programs and policies size up to the expectations that Albertans have in terms of these particular programs and policies that come from the government. As I've said, this is unique. A number of provinces have already asked for this grid, as have organizations and municipalities around the province. I'm happy to report it's also been translated into French by the Quebec government as they want to apply it to their programming there.

We've also developed a full inventory of government programs – this is the first time this was done – so that we can see the programs in each and every department that affect families and by a very quick process be able to see where there could be possible areas of redundancy and where co-ordination can be improved.

We're aware and I know most Albertans are aware that we've seen the first ever family service awards where families, businesses, individuals who have worked to strengthen and support Alberta families, be it through research projects or other types of support, have been acknowledged around the province in an actual service award ceremony which took place this year, the first one ever, with the Premier and the Lieutenant Governor and the families and businesses and organizations involved. It was a very inspiring event which will continue to serve and highlight the fact that there are wonderful people, businesses, organizations, and agencies supporting Alberta families.

I'll close by letting you know, Mr. Chairman, through you to the Premier and to the members here, that in a few days from now the demographic report entitled Alberta Families Today will be released which will provide the most up-to-date, the most comprehensive profile on families ever that we've been able to compile here in the province. This will include areas such as profiles on marriage, family roles, work and leisure, ethnicity, age distribution, and emerging trends and statistics. This will be vital in the use and preparation of programs and policy around the province.

I could go on for quite some time, Mr. Chairman, but I don't want to take opposition members' time or government members' time who have questions they want to ask, and I will be looking forward to those questions.

I'd like to also acknowledge another MLA who serves on this council, the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake, and also the citizens from around the province who have worked so hard to make these initiatives successful.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The minister responsible for Seniors.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be presenting my estimates to you not only as minister responsible for Seniors but also as minister responsible for the Alberta

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, the Alberta Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Seniors Advisory Council, and Michener Centre.

I welcome the opportunity to present this budget to you, Mr. Chairman, because it's a budget reflecting our commitment to Alberta seniors and persons with disabilities. It is a budget of commitment indeed. In a time when Albertans and Alberta are feeling the effects of Canada's national recession and when as a province we have had to face up to some very difficult economic realities, we've been able to maintain and enhance our support for seniors in Alberta. We've been able to maintain and enhance our commitment to work to ensure full participation by persons with disabilities in the life of our province.

Since the establishment of the ministry responsible for Seniors last year, we've worked aggressively and intently on making our seniors an integral part of the decision-building process of this government with respect to seniors' programs and services. We're also worked to help Albertans with disabilities have the opportunity to become equal in this province: equal in education, equal in employment, equal in access to programs and services. We've worked to implement the principles of individual choice and participation in the life of Alberta, and the estimates we're reviewing today reflect our continued commitment to the pursuit of these principles.

4:20

We're committed to ensuring that seniors today have the opportunity to enjoy the results of their labours. We are committed to ensuring that as health technology and pharmaceuticals and higher standards of living allow us to live longer, seniors can look forward to not only a longer life but a quality of life in their later years. To do so, however, we must confront some very significant challenges both economic and social. The number of seniors in Alberta and the percentage of the population they make up is increasing dramatically, as are the costs of our seniors' programs and services. We must be able to continue to provide those essential programs and services to meet the needs of seniors in attaining a safe, secure, and productive life-style in their later years, yet we must provide our support to seniors in need at a cost that the province can afford.

That may mean changes, Mr. Chairman, in both the way we deliver our programs and services and changes in the nature of some of those programs. We will need to look at new and innovative approaches to providing support to seniors in need, but those new approaches will be developed in partnership with seniors themselves. We've made a clear and firm commitment to consult with seniors on programs and services, a clear commitment to involve seniors in identification of issues and priorities and in the development of solutions to our economic and social challenges, and we are doing just that.

The 1992-93 estimates indicate an overall expenditure of a little over \$50 million, a decrease, actually, of 2.7 percent in expenditure estimates from last year due to a decreased utilization of the Alberta assured income plan. The Alberta assured income plan, Mr. Chairman, is an income supplement for low-income seniors provided by the government of Alberta. The Alberta assured income plan is automatically provided to any Alberta senior receiving the federal guaranteed income supplement. As the income of our seniors has risen over the past years, the number of seniors requiring the guaranteed income supplement has decreased. We have therefore reduced our forecasted expenditures in this area by 4.3 percent. I will stress, however, that the Alberta assured income plan has not itself been changed or reduced.

The remaining 4 percent includes almost \$502,000 budgeted for the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, an increase of 1.6 percent over last year. Under the chairmanship of my colleague the Member for Bow Valley the council plays an important role in advising the government on issues and concerns for seniors. The budget this year will allow the council to continue to facilitate that flow of information between government and Alberta seniors. You will note that the administrative costs, including salaries and supplies and services, in this vote have increase by 148 percent over last year. Of course, Mr. Chairman, our ministry was only operational for half of last year.

The budget for Michener Centre has been reduced by .6 percent. This reduction, however, reflects a decrease in the base budget for the centre as a result of declining population. As more and more Albertans with developmental disabilities are choosing to remain at home rather than look to institutional care and as many former residents of Michener Centre have returned to community living situations, the overall resident population at Michener has indeed decreased. We are committed, however, to both maintaining the quality of care available at Michener Centre and to providing Albertans with developmental disabilities with the opportunity to choose community living as a viable life-style. To do so, we will continue to maintain the delicate balance required between resources for Michener Centre and the resources for community supports programs.

On a related area, I'd refer you to page 175 of the estimates, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. During its four years of existence the council has provided government with invaluable advice with respect to matters concerning the status of persons with disabilities. The council Action Plan has, in fact, given us a blueprint for innovative and concrete steps to help persons with disabilities achieve equal status in our society. As a government we've already implemented a large number of the council's recommendations in the Action Plan, and we are committed to aggressively following up the remaining recommendations during the coming year. The importance that this government places on matters related to persons with disabilities and the value we place on the work of the Premier's council are clearly evident by the close to 10 percent increase in budget afforded to the council this year.

I would like to touch very briefly on our activities directed towards the prevention and treatment of substance abuse in Alberta. There are under my area of responsibility two main vehicles to carry our fight against substance abuse: the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and the Alberta Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation. Working together, complementing and co-ordinating efforts, these two agencies will help Alberta retain its place as an international leader in the prevention and treatment of substance abuse. The Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation will focus its efforts on research and education and is funded through the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund.

I'm now going to ask my colleague from Calgary-McCall, the chairman of AADAC, to give you a quick overview of the commission.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just be very brief as time is short this afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, first of all I'd like to thank the Premier and Executive Council for the continued support of the programs that AADAC services throughout the province of Alberta. AADAC has had a phenomenal track record over the years and has a very loyal and dedicated staff to present these programs to people who

are hurting, people who have an illness and need all the help they can get.

It should be noted that AADAC assists some 60 offices and funded agencies throughout the province for treatment service, education, prevention, and other services. AADAC delivered treatment service directly to some 30,000 people in Alberta in the last year. We have a number of additions to AADAC that are progressing exceptionally well over the last couple of years. Those are our adolescent programs, the treatment centre in Grande Prairie, and five new rural offices. We also participated in the release of the report on alcohol and drugs in the workplace, which is a first in Canada, well acknowledged by many who have seen it including our federal counterparts.

We must recognize, however, that AADAC receives requests for funding from many organizations and special interest groups throughout the province. We can't meet all those requests, nor should we. We have to prioritize the things that we're able to do and do them well, and hopefully we will meet the needs of all Albertans to the extent possible.

The particular budget here shows a 4.2 percent decrease, and we can well maintain our services to Albertans with this budget, Mr. Chairman. There are a number of areas that we've reduced. We've reduced travel by \$40,000. We've reduced mass media support to our prevention programs by \$400,000, and our management and information systems by \$125,000. We've consolidated the counseling services in Edmonton and Calgary; that will help save \$235,000. The impaired driving programs that we have been looking after for the Solicitor General appear to be going to be transferred to them. So this is a budget that we feel can well maintain the services in Alberta.

We should also address the issue of our funded agencies, Mr. Chairman. We have increased funding to these agencies by 2 and a half percent to assist them in delivering a valuable service to Albertans. In addition to the money they receive from the government through AADAC, of course they do assist us by raising funds of their own in various programs throughout their communities.

Mr. Chairman, I would be only too happy to address any questions, either verbally here in the House or if necessary in writing at a later time. Again, I would like to congratulate the staff at AADAC for the quality of programs they deliver on behalf of all Albertans and also to thank the government, in particular the Premier, for his dedication to the issue of addictions within the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:30

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

DR. ELLIOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As chairman of the Northern Alberta Development Council, it's always a pleasure to make comments about that council, and I wish to thank the Premier and the minister responsible for northern development for their continued support for the council and the work that we're doing there. I also say thank you to the members of the board and to my colleague from Lesser Slave Lake, who sits on that same council.

In the past year council has received 177 briefs from northern Albertans as we are doing the work which is our objective, and our objective can be very briefly stated. It's to increase public participation in the planning and delivery of government services to the citizens of northern Alberta. This is done through public meetings, receiving briefs, analyzing the briefs, and presenting conferences and seminars as required.

Mr. Chairman, we work very closely with the line departments, and through the co-operation of the various ministers and their departments we get the job done. I'd like to use three very brief examples of how we do this. Example number one would be our Northern Alberta Development Council bursary, where we work with the Department of Advanced Education. In the past year 151 bursaries were awarded, and one in four students was selected.

A second example would be our work currently with the Department of Energy as we are preparing presentations for the review panel on the Electric Energy Marketing Agency. We have a program where we are presenting the feelings of northern Albertans and the importance of the possible increase in the costs of electrical energy. We are making it very well known to the panel that any increase in the cost of energy for the north would be very detrimental not only to the private consumer but to the municipalities, schools, hospitals, and any other form of consumer in the north.

A third example would be the policing in northern Alberta. We're working very closely with the Solicitor General's department, and there we can point out that we have a major seminar coming up at Lac La Biche on June 4 and 5, where we'll be reviewing the many briefs that have been received from northerners. We've been working with that department and with the RCMP in researching the problem of increased policing costs, and the seminar will serve to accommodate northerners as they review these costs and come up with recommendations. This will be presented in a position paper to government for their guidance and consideration.

Mr. Chairman, with those few comments I'll pass the program back.

MR. ADAIR: Mr. Chairman, the only reason I rise is that the hon. chairman of the Northern Alberta Development Council, the Member for Grande Prairie, is also served by the branch that I have responsibility for. I just wanted mainly to state that there were two different entities and that the branch relies on the secretariat to in fact provide them with a backup to any of the briefs that they do get in the northern part of the province. We're also the group that handled the Canada-Alberta northern agreement, one that ended on March 31 as far as applications but for the next two years will be feeding funds to the projects that were approved at that time. We're presently working on WEPA; that's the new agreement. We have some funds in that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's interesting that the last one on the list is the one that talks about water, because it's indeed water that makes most of the rest of these activities happen. If we don't have water, industrial development and all those other things that go along with it don't always exist.

Mr. Chairman, in reporting this year on the Water Resources Commission, it's made up of two MLAs – myself as chairman and the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House as the second MLA on the committee – and four public members from as far north as High Level and as far south as one who's a resident on the Milk River about five and half miles north of the American border. So as you can see, we have a wide public representation on this commission. In addition, there are five government departments – Agriculture; Economic Development and Trade; Environment; Forestry, Lands and Wildlife; and Municipal Affairs – all represented by deputy ministers. If members of the Assembly are good enough to pass Bill 26 that's before us relating to the Water Resources Commission, it will extend the life of that commission

another five years. We will be finishing this year our 10th year in existence, and it will extend it another five years and also add a representative, an assistant deputy minister from the Department of Transportation and Utilities. The trouble is that when you're around for quite a while, sometimes you slip back to the old names that you knew for a number of years.

The recent activities of the Water Resources Commission, some of which were covered by the Premier in his comments, include the workshops that we held throughout this province, some 16 in the months of November and December, relating to the Water Resources Act review and the need for a new Water Resources Act because it hadn't been touched for 40 or 50 years. The activity that we chose as members of the Water Resources Commission was that of using workshops, where people would go to meetings and they'd be broken into a number of workshops, eight or 10 around a table. We found that that really works well, because the average guy that's hesitant to get up in front of a group of people and make a speech will come forward with a lot of good ideas when he's sitting around a table discussing things with you. That system really seemed to work, because we had many comments on it throughout all parts of Alberta.

Other activities and the studies that we've taken on so far this year, some of which finish this year and some of which are continuing, include in-stream flow needs determinations. We've done that on a couple of river systems now and are starting some more. It's really a long-term study. Hopefully at one point, funding exists to cover most of the rivers in the province of Alberta. Last year we finished up the wetlands policy for settled areas of the province, and as a result of that, there have been a lot of comments made about what wetlands policy should be. The commission has made recommendations to cabinet on this policy. Other reviews that we have looked at and made comments on include, for example, the Canadian heritage rivers systems, which we've commented on and made recommendations on to cabinet members.

The one unique thing about the Water Resources Commission is it's the one commission that's listed under responsibilities of Executive Council that reports to a committee, not a minister. The Water Resources Commission reports to the economic planning committee of cabinet rather than directly to a minister. Our budget this year is some 4.4 percent below the budget of last year.

Mr. Chairman, I think that briefly covers the activities of the Water Resources Commission. I look forward to responding to any questions.

Thank you.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Chairman, I just want to make it clear that there are other ministers here prepared to comment on their responsibilities, but as requested from members of the opposition, we've asked them to hold their comments, although if there are opportunities, they'll want to get in and perhaps respond to questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be short, too, and the remainder of the time that we want to use I would donate to the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

Mr. Chairman, I was going to go and talk about all the major issues of the day, but in view of the time, I'd like to focus on just a couple of items quickly. If I heard the Premier right, we're going back to a First Ministers' Conference. I guess what I would say as Leader of the Opposition is that the future of the country is important. I don't kid myself about how important I

am in that venture, but as before, if there is any way that you thought I could be of help, I'd certainly go with the wishes that the Premier had at the time. We'd look forward to it later, and if you thought we could play a helpful role there, I certainly would be quite prepared to do that. Again, thank you, Premier, for that offer. I might say, having learned once, I'll take more than two shirts along. Last time we were there, at the Meech Lake thing, I began to think I was a hostage in Ottawa and we'd never get out of there. I'm sure the Premier felt the same way at that particular time.

4:40

Mr. Chairman, hopefully, we can put the Constitution behind us. The important thing is that we do have to deal with it at this date, but as I've said often, I think people are constitutioned out. I certainly get that feeling when I'm talking to people in my riding and around the province. I think people are tired of it. They want to get on with other issues, economic issues, social issues. In many cases since Meech, for some people there is a perception that this is something that politicians fight over, while the rest of us are worried about our jobs or losing our farms or whatever the case may be. I think all of us hope that Canada will stay Canada but, above all, that we'll come to some resolution.

I would suggest to the Premier that if we do get through this and get a constitutional deal and somebody else wants to raise in the very near future about some other constitutional talks, I hope we will not deal with the Constitution again for another hundred years, Mr. Chairman. The country will have a much better chance of staying together, frankly.

Mr. Chairman, the only other point I would make – and I was going to go into it in a little more detail, but I won't because we've had major debates and will continue, I'm sure, in the Legislature in question period. I'd just stress to you, through the Chairman, that I believe that we are in deep difficulty in this province in terms of the economy, in terms of the directions that we're going. Now, I know the Premier's liable not to agree with me on this, and I'm sure the government wouldn't, but I think it's important. When we look at this year's budget and when you take in the consolidated debt, we're talking about a \$2.9 billion deficit. That's \$1,167 per person. When you look at eight straight deficit budgets totaling \$15.76 billion, when you look at how during that time we went from a province with net assets of \$11.87 billion to a debt of \$4.57 billion, when you notice that Moody's Investors Service – and we've had this discussion – has taken us from AA2 to AA1, that's sending a very powerful message to investors not only here in Alberta but to the world. I can't stress to the Premier how much damage has been done by the loss of, by their figures, \$566 million – and we'll see how that breaks down – and the message that that has sent out not only here in Alberta, certainly to the people I talked to on the weekend, but all across Canada and even farther.

Mr. Chairman, I think the perception of some people, at least, is that the government is not taking this seriously enough, that the economy is floundering and still Mr. Johnston is saying that we're still the best in the world, the best here, the best that, the best everything, and there's not a realization that we have structural problems here and that times are going to get perhaps in some ways tougher in the future, dealing with this debt.

I've made a number of suggestions to the Premier, Mr. Chairman, in the past. I think we'd send this message out. I think he can pick whomever he wants, but if we sent the message about a smaller cabinet, if we looked at the whole area of agents general and what they're doing, even if there is some odd work that is good there, we can no longer afford it. I still think there's more to cut, although admittedly in the Throne speech there was

talk about some boards and commissions. I've suggested in the past – it's not news – to at least cut the salaries of cabinet ministers, yourself as Premier, other people who are making extra money. That doesn't solve all the problems. Admittedly, it's not all dollars, but I think it sends an important message to Albertans that these are different times, these are very different times than what we've faced in the past. If we got that message out, then we could begin to do the rest of the tough jobs that we have to do.

Now, the government itself admits that that so-called balanced budget is down the way. Well, there's a feeling, if I may say so to the Premier, Mr. Chairman, among the people that I talk to – and some of them are Conservatives, but they say, "Look, we didn't create the deficit; it's you politicians that did it." They're saying: "What did we get out of this? It's been squandered." I think there has to be a very clear message coming from the top that we at least recognize the difficulties that we're facing and recognize the unemployment and the rest of it.

This is nothing new, that I haven't said before, Mr. Chairman, and in view of the fact that there is limited time, I'd call on the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just move through these votes numerically.

Vote 2, the Northern Alberta Development Council. I believe that I've often received their reports, and I thank the hon. member for sending them to me. They're excellent and make excellent recommendations, so I would thank the hon. member for that.

Vote 4, Co-ordination and Advice Respecting Women's Issues. The first vote, 4.1, the Women's Secretariat: I think that we have welcomed the PR campaigns put on by the secretariat, but without the support services being in place, these PR campaigns can sometimes be a cruel hoax. I think of the violence against women or violence in the family campaign, where they say that violence is a crime and to report it, yet we know that women are being turned away from shelters, that social services allowances plunge women and their children into poverty. I welcome these campaigns, but without the support services from other departments of this government, false expectations are established. I think the crisis that can be engendered by the expectation that there is support there when there isn't has a terrible toll and a terrible cost. It may mean that people who seek help for issues for which there is inadequate or no help at all may be much more reluctant to reach out again.

In terms of the council, the council has done excellent work over the years. I would really commend the Chair of that council. Their latest report on supports for independence again needs to be studied by all departments. The reports on employment equity, immigrant women, maintenance enforcement, midwifery: excellent reports, excellent recommendations. But where are the government's actions? Nearly a million dollars to this vote, yet what is the action that demonstrates the government's commitment on behalf of women? Supports for Independence is clear in outlining how government programs fail women. It continues their ghettoization. There's differential treatment for women, including the spouse-in-the-house rule of social services. The failure to address the needs of 16- and 17-year-olds is certainly highlighted, as our attention is drawn to the issue of adolescent juvenile prostitution. The need that immigrant women have for English as a Second Language training, recognition and sensitivity to the cultural constraints placed on them. The advisory council looks at the failure to meet the child care needs of women who are moving back into the paid labour force or even the needs of

women to parent, to be mothers. It looks at the impact of transportation allowances on families. Where is the action? Where is the action on employment equity and pay equity? The only Alberta businesses that are proactive in regard to pay equity are those who are complying with federal government guidelines, so to suggest that the private sector will willingly bring in pay equity is a false assumption.

We still have problems in regard to maintenance enforcement. Although there are some improvements, again where is the action? Why have a council if the government is not going to look seriously at the recommendations?

We are still waiting for the midwifery legislation which was recommended two years ago. Approximately a month ago we were told that we could look forward to it within two or three weeks, so we're still waiting for that.

4:50

That brings me to vote 8, policy and legislation for professions and occupations. So the midwifery: a major report, comprehensive recommendations re licensing, education, monitoring. Again, where is the action? We hear promises, but where is the action? Women of Alberta are waiting.

Again, we have the optometrists, opticians. I understand the stakeholders are agreed, so where is the legislation? Why the delays? What is going on?

When we look at vote 9, I would look at vote 9.0.2, Communications Planning, a 400 percent increase. I'm wondering if there is an explanation for this huge increase.

The Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families. I think the concept is a good idea. I think we need to have some agency that has a mandate to look at the impact of legislation and policies on families. One of the problems, of course, is that we don't have a clear definition of what is a family, and much of the language of the grid is general and undefined.

We wonder also whether the council on families will be taking seriously the Advisory Council on Women's Issues' reports, say on supports for independence, because what they talk about in that report has a profound meaning for family life in Alberta. Women are centrally concerned about families and family life, so the needs of women must be of paramount interest to the Premier's council on the family.

I have to ask: will the council be consulted by the Minister of Family and Social Services when they decide what they're going to do about the new child benefits program being brought in by Revenue Canada through federal taxation? Will the council be consulted when the minister is deciding whether these payments will be deducted from social assistance benefits?

When, I ask again and again, will the impact of poverty and violence on families be taken seriously by this council? I attended the Premier's council on the family, the conference they had. I heard over and over again that the two most destructive forces in society today against families are poverty and violence. So when we have a 10, 11 percent unemployment rate, that is a primary concern to families. That is what tears families apart. Violence, which occurs most of the time within the family context, destroys families. Is this council addressing these most central issues?

Has the council looked at the impact of the restructuring of day care subsidies on families? I think particularly of single-parent families and two-income families that are barely managing at the poverty line. I've heard it said by some women that they have been legislated back into the home. One again has to look at the principle of the grid that talks about the desire for self-sufficiency and independence for families. Is this not in some cases a harsh policy of forcing people off social assistance into a world of

insecure and low-paying jobs? I think of the woman forced to hitchhike to an education placement who then had to hitchhike home to pick up her five-year-old child, hitchhike back to confirm the fact that she had been registered, and then hitchhike home again. Is the council looking at these kinds of policies? Is the council looking at our day care policies, the lack of really adequate standards, the lack of enforcement? The things that we hear about going on in our child care centres and in our foster homes: has this been made a priority of this Premier's council on families? Because that is what it's all about, and it's all about decent and affordable housing. Has the council been looking at the provision of that, of social assistance allowances above the poverty line, school user fees and what that means for marginal families and their children? What has the increase in recreational and cultural facility entrance admission meant for low-income or middle-low, middle-income families, and what does that mean in terms of their development?

Has the council looked at the policy of reintegrating families where in fact there's been violence in the family and at the notion of least intrusiveness in families and what that means to children? In the social services department, where we're dealing with families that are somehow not able to function, how are those policies really working to make family life better, and who is the primary focus? Do we sometimes sacrifice the well-being of children in the name of this idealized image of a family? I would ask: is the council looking at that? Because women's poverty means poverty for families, is the council looking at the importance of pay equity legislation? We've also called for the establishment of family resource centres as a way of prevention, because of course that's what is important.

I would now take you to vote 16 and another family endeavour, the Alberta Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation – Planning. I understand that this foundation is getting \$5 million for research and education from the heritage trust fund. When we spoke against the establishment of this foundation, we said that what is being established is another bureaucracy, that the money could be well spent by AADAC. Why do we have to have two bureaucracies co-ordinating together when one bureaucracy would do just fine? AADAC has a well-known track record throughout the world for quality work in treatment, education, and prevention, and if they had ever been given the money for it, I'm sure they could have pulled off the research that this foundation is mandated to do. What we see is project funding, but I would submit that particularly in education you don't want projects. You want ongoing funding so you can learn from the education programs that are being presented, so that they are evaluated and then you build on what has been done there. I would say: let's get rid of this money wasted on a bureaucracy and give \$5 million to AADAC to carry out their programs.

The final vote I would come to is vote 18, which is AADAC. I have grave concern about the reduction in Support Services and in Prevention and Education. We see a 30 percent decrease in Prevention and Education, and I am unconvinced by the member's rationalizations about how he in fact is saving that money, or how that money is being saved, and how it can mean anything but a reduction in the prevention and education programs that are being presented by this agency. When we spoke about the establishment of the Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation, we predicted that money would be taken from AADAC, and here it is, in this budget, a 30 percent reduction in Prevention and Education. We have to ask: does this reduction mean the government believes that substance abuse is no longer the problem it was, that they can reduce the Prevention and Education budget by such a significant amount? If this is the case, why did they establish the foundation?

If substance abuse is still a problem, then where is their commitment to prevention?

It is through prevention and education that we can save incredible dollars down the road in terms of treatment dollars. We save more than that, however. We save the lost hours from the paid labour force, we save the destruction of interpersonal relationships in families and in the community, and we save the personal pain and suffering of people who are caught in the terrible cycle of substance abuse.

5:00

We have seen the closing for the summer of the Spady Centre, and I have long had concerns about the lack of resources given to the detoxification centre, the lack of medical personnel. I know about this personally because a friend of mine had a son and daughter-in-law admitted there, and the outcome eventually was a suicide. There was a failure of treatment. There was a failure to recognize that at the time of crisis you do not put people on waiting lists. You do not come and tell them to come back in three days to have a blood test or a urinalysis. You treat them, because the time of crisis is the most important time for intervention. It is the time when you can have the best chance of making an act that can save incredible pain. So I say, how many people are told to come back again next week, next month, go back into the cycle of alcohol and drug abuse? This is no commitment, I would submit, to dealing with this issue in a significant way.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would thank you and close.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to share my time with my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Chairman, I want to speak to votes 4, 10, 16, 17, and 18, about a minute each. But first of all, I would like to thank the Premier for his remarks and just express my thanks for the energy that he and the Deputy Premier are putting forward in the constitutional talks. I don't always agree, but I do appreciate the kind of time and input and energy that has to be expended here and his continuing commitment to triple E. The Premier might comment on the status of Motion 4. Our debate has not concluded on it, but my question there is whether or not Alberta in a New Canada: Visions of Unity does in his mind form the basis of the negotiations between this province and the other Premiers in the constitutional talks. What is the status of that particular report?

Mr. Chairman, if I can go to vote 4, Co-ordination and Advice Respecting Women's Issues, and the secretariat. I appreciate there have been a number of programs that the secretariat has run this year, and I have just two or three quick questions. Has any assessment been done on the impact of the campaigns, particularly the Family Violence is a Crime campaign? Would the minister give us some details as to how it has made any difference in terms of curbing the cycle of violence, and has the minister been in consultation with women's shelters and counseling programs to determine what their thoughts are in regard to this very expensive ad? In other words, I want to know if anything worked. I think that's important from the outset, that we have a means of indicating whether or not we're getting value for the money.

I also want to thank the council for their recent study on supports for independence and the impact that program is having on Alberta women. I believe that study was a very damning indictment of the social assistance programs and reinforces the concerns that we've had right along. I'm glad the council saw fit to take on the task. At least they were ready and willing to do the research that I had hoped the minister himself would want to do.

I have some questions in regard to the council and the secretariat. We're still waiting for the secretariat's annual report, and I don't know what the holdup is there. I'd also like to know from the minister how the \$800,000 is to be spent this year, what projects are going on, anything new, what reports, what recommendations to government. I'd like to know, too, what public policies have been reviewed by the secretariat and if any recommendations flowing from that review were sent to the government.

I want to thank the minister for responding to my request to have a status report and an update on the advisory council's recommendation and what the government response is going to be relative to the many excellent recommendations they've put forward. I would like to know from the minister, regarding the council's report on supports for independence, what action the minister is taking to help reduce the number of women living in poverty in our province.

I'd like to know, Mr. Chairman, if any action is expected regarding amendments to the Employment Standards Code. Benefits for part-time workers have long been a problem that we've experienced.

Pensions: we still are waiting for some leadership here. What action if any has the minister taken to develop adequate pension provisions, particularly for homemakers, and changes to the discriminatory widows' pension to include single and divorced women?

Pay equity: I see no progress in this particular area. I wonder if there's anything coming up.

We inquired about the 1989-90 initiative contained in the Plan for Action for Women, a comprehensive review of reproductive health policies and programs. Has that been concluded, and has it been made public?

Has the minister made any attempts either through the council or the Women's Secretariat to investigate what the situation is in respect to child care options for mothers in the province? We see that they are turning away from formal settings and going to a more informal kind of child care. What significance does this have, and are we looking at this from the standpoint of safety of children?

The Task Force on Foreign Qualifications, Mr. Chairman: a tremendous impact on immigrant women, and we know they're waiting for some leadership here. Is there a holdup, and why haven't we seen that report?

Mr. Chairman, last year there was an important study by one of the major Canadian banks on the impact of the glass ceiling on women in management. The bank study found that certain myths that we had felt before were simply not true. The female employees didn't show any greater pattern of work stoppages, career stoppages, than their male counterparts. Has the minister undertaken or does she know of any particular research that would help women in Alberta?

Mr. Chairman, vote 10, the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, is down by 3.1 percent. I'd just like to say yes, we have seen the Family Policy Grid. The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore has asked a number of questions on this particular grid, and I'll look forward to the answers to her questions.

Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to ask the chairman once again, formally, about children in poverty and his council's work in that regard. I understand that there is some ongoing work. Perhaps we could have tabled in the House the terms of reference of studies and the timing of them. It has become a very visible and critical problem, not only in our cities but in many communities in Alberta, and I believe we need some direction from this particular council.

Mr. Chairman, the grid indicates that there are guidelines now for legislators to follow, and I wonder about how well this is working. Perhaps the chairman could tell us whether or not the system is working. One example that I can raise is the youngster who is gravely handicapped who should be at home with his family, but the home care ceiling doesn't allow that to happen. It would cost us much less to keep him at home, where he could have some quality of life that would be important to him and his family, if in fact we could have a double level of funding for home care.

Mr. Chairman, I think we were all interested in this weekend's articles on mall rats and the increasing problem of homeless teenagers or teenagers who live on the street or in the malls. Is the council on families looking at that, looking at causes, looking at the potential for that, for kids not finishing high school, not finishing school at all, and where interventions could be made?

I wonder why the family grid guidelines are not being used by the Department of Health and why there is ongoing reluctance to provide dysfunctional families, families that are experiencing ongoing situations of violence, with counseling and treatment programs. It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that we've got something missing. There's a gap there between what the grid is saying and what the Department of Health is actually doing.

5:10

Where, again, is the council in terms of speaking out about the supports for independence program, the rates of social assistance, the need to use the food bank?

In terms of drug treatment and the decision by Alberta Health to require prior approval, has the council been active in helping those families seek alternative programs and services in our province or in Canada as opposed to going to the States?

Does the council have a position in regard to day care? Mr. Chairman, we were deeply concerned with the monitoring and enforcement of day care regulations and the startling information that we received, the potential for children to be at risk in some of our day cares, leaving families very much disturbed. Has the council taken a position in that regard?

Mr. Chairman, last year we saw the conclusion of the study on family and community support services. An excellent study, it appeared in the Throne speech as a commitment of the government. However, I haven't seen any money in the budget for it. Has the council on families made any interventions or any submissions to the government about that per capita increase to \$26? It seems to me this is a primary way that the Alberta council on families could act.

Mr. Chairman, we're still waiting for comprehensive training and support systems for foster parents. What is the council's position on that?

Vote 16, programs for seniors. Mr. Chairman, I have consistently said that we didn't need this department. I, too, have many concerns about seniors and have worked extensively with them. I appreciate that the minister wants to get into consultation with them. I submit that this need not have required a whole separate department in order to make that commitment, and I would hope that that can be reconsidered and amalgamated with another department. Seniors are deeply concerned about problems that they have, those on fixed incomes about the amount that's being spent just to keep this ministry going. I hope the consultation proves that there will be some better services for seniors and that we will not only listen to them but that we will act on their advice and their recommendations. Of course, their major worries are about housing, about getting choices in housing as their capacity to manage their own home changes, about an independent lifestyle, and certainly about home care and health care for seniors.

Mr. Chairman, part of the difficulty, of course, is the problem of elderly women. In Alberta 71 percent of elderly women live below the poverty line. Perhaps the minister responsible could comment on that and what, if anything, he is prepared to do for that particular deprived group in our society.

Mr. Chairman, why did the minister allow cuts to occur in the various seniors' housing projects in this year's budget, cuts to seniors' independent living, a 14 percent cut to seniors' emergency medical alert program, a 55 percent cut to the seniors' improvement? I see the minister shaking his head; perhaps he can explain it. I want to ask the minister if he is prepared now to make a commitment that there are not going to be future cuts.

Mr. Chairman, again the widows' pension. I want to ask the minister where you're at in terms of a decision, Mr. Minister, about a means test, based on assets, for seniors' programs. This is a question that is constantly raised with me and I'm sure with other members.

Mr. Chairman, the minister claims that the cuts to seniors' housing and independent living have been made because the demand is down. I wonder if we could have some substantive information in that regard.

Let me go on briefly to Michener Centre Operations. The minister did state some of their plans here. The recommendation in the Claiming My Future report to implement a plan in 1990 to relocate persons with mental handicaps and so on: I take it that that mobility is still happening and I take it that the minister still expects that by the end of 1995 - is it anticipated that Michener will be shut down or closed at that point in time? Mr. Chairman, we all worry about the fact of moving people into our communities when there are insufficient services available for them and insufficient protection for them in possibly even encounters with the law.

Mr. Chairman, I cannot comprehend why we don't as yet have standards in our group homes. Where are these? Can we know what they are? How are they being enforced? We've got enough problems with day care without getting into this one. It's absolutely essential that these be in place, be understood by families, by the public, by our communities before we start such things as moving many people out of safe places.

Mr. Chairman, just a couple of comments about vote 18. I, too, want to commend AADAC for their work. I deplore the closure of the Spady Centre. I don't know what people are supposed to do, where they're supposed to go. I don't want to talk about \$566 million; I want to talk about \$18,000 or \$19,000. It seems to me that with a foundation of \$200 million, Mr. Premier, we can find \$18,000 to keep that thing open. If the foundation is there with money to invest in research, surely we can develop a research project that would keep the centre open for the summer. It just seems to me that it's false economy to close that.

Mr. Chairman, AADAC is already burdened with tremendous demand for their programs. Many of them have waiting lists. Support Services were cut - I've got 30 seconds left - and the largest cut in Prevention and Education. I'm very concerned that on the one hand we develop a foundation for substance abuse that appears to be struggling with its own mandate to find ways to make important contributions, yet at the same time we're cutting back on the program that we know works. I don't see that as having a great deal of good sense or being prudent in its support to families or to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to yield to my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [some applause] Thank you to the Member for Grande Prairie. [interjections] I know; Peace River.

I'm going to speak mainly on vote 11, but I just want to make a brief comment. I go through this entire Executive Council budget, and one thing that is very noticeable to me is Payments to MLAs: \$15,000, \$17,000, \$20,000, another \$15,000, \$18,898, and \$14,000. When I total this up, Mr. Chairman, it totals \$99,898. Now, that may not seem significant in terms of the overall picture, extra compensation for work which government MLAs are already doing, but that \$99,898 is only \$102 short of that request that was made by Artspace, and the Minister of Health will remember this and the struggle that they had to go through to receive some of the dollars that they had requested. I raise that because it does illustrate in terms of priorities that when things are tough, when things are tight, we've got to address this on a proper basis. Even these amounts of money that some may gauge as being small can be very, very important to the right segment of the population.

In vote 11 the Action Plan was heralded by many people when it was first introduced. There were some announcements in the last session. National awareness week is around the corner. Possibly there are some announcements coming forward, because in this session there's been no direction. There's been no announcement. There's been no optimism to feel that more will be achieved from the Action Plan. We're talking in terms of an amount of money of roughly \$800,000 to support an organization that we're expecting results from. We are getting results from them, but we're not getting results from the government in addressing those concerns. That has to be a concern to the Premier when he addresses these various budgets, as to when is something more going to come out of that.

5:20

Mr. Chairman, I spoke of Artspace, which is one complex dealing with alternative housing for persons with disabilities, and there are others, like the Sir Douglas Bader Tower, and so on, but there is a drastic shortage of more. There are waiting lists that are beyond belief when we talk in terms of persons with disabilities trying to find suitable accommodation. That's a priority. Persons with disabilities want to be back in the community with the support services to keep them there. It's for their well-being and it's for the well-being of the economics of this province as well.

Along with housing, persons with disabilities want employment opportunities. The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore spoke of 10 or 11 percent unemployment at this time. When there's 10 or 11 percent unemployment for the average population, you can imagine the figures that would be involved when we talk in terms of persons with disabilities. Here we're talking maybe 65, maybe 70 percent of persons with disabilities that are unemployed. Most want to go to work. Most want a dignified life-style.

Mr. Chairman, I've got to touch very briefly on AISH. The concept of AISH when it was first implemented was good. It was one of the programs that I was very, very largely involved with lobbying for. AISH has become very, very restrictive, and the way some of the rules are being applied within the bureaucracy would bring tears to one's eyes. I kid you not. I would urge the minister to go back to the bureaucracy and talk to his people that are enforcing these rules to show a little bit of flexibility, show a little bit of compassion, and not always come down with that heavy hammer. These are people we're talking about. They're not numbers. They're not files. They're not simply global figures. These are individuals; these are people. People on AISH are probably going to look forward to AISH for the rest of their lives, so let's give them a bit of dignity.

We talk, Mr. Chairman, of Aids to Daily Living, another program that was very, very good when it was first introduced. Now the restrictions are becoming much, much tighter. I realize there's a need for caps in some areas. You capped the amount of expenditures, for example, that an individual is allowed to accumulate in one year for repairs to wheelchairs, but if you took a look at the prices for these various parts, sometimes it's impossible to comply. What's an individual to do if he or she has a month to go in that fiscal term and the wheelchair breaks down, but he's told, "Sorry; you've already hit your allocation"? What's that person to do, sit at home and beg for a month, waiting until the next fiscal period to free up a hundred dollars to get a wheelchair repaired? It may sound stupid, but that's the way the rules are being applied. That flexibility is not there. I feel it's very, very important if the Premier is to maintain credibility in the so-called Action Plan, the concept of the Premier's council for Albertans with disabilities, that these types of items be addressed.

The one area that I've really got to pay compliments on is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, where we saw the HAP program increased to \$5,000. That has really, really helped, and those disabled persons that have utilized it have appreciated it very much because \$5,000 allows much more flexibility than the original \$1,000 when it comes to doing wheelchair adaptations to one's home or suite to make it livable for an individual in a wheelchair.

On that note, I'm going to conclude to allow a couple of minutes for someone to respond.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

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

MR. SPEAKER: Those that concur in the report, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.
Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, it's not intended that we sit this evening, but rather that we're able to respond to the invitation from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

Tomorrow afternoon will be private members' business. Tomorrow evening it's intended that we sit again in Committee of Supply to deal with estimates of the department of the Provincial Treasurer.

[At 5:26 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 2:30 p.m.]

