

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Friday, February 5, 1993**

10:00 a.m.

Date: 93/02/05

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I wish to give oral notice of the following motion:

Be it resolved that the debate on second reading of Bill 55, the Electoral Divisions Statutes Amendment Act, 1993, shall not be further adjourned.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. ADAIR: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure and an honour today to introduce 16 grade 6 students along with teacher Miss Palko, two drivers, and three adults. They are from Jean Baptiste Sewepagaham school in the Peace River constituency. They are with us this morning. They've been to Calgary for four days. They're here today, in Slave Lake tonight, and on their way home from that point on. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

### Employment Statistics

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. Today we find that the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate has declined slightly in Alberta from 9.4 percent to 9.2. [interjection] I wouldn't clap right away. It's not because unemployment is down; it's because Albertans have lost hope and have stopped looking for work. In other words, the work force has shrunk, especially among young people. When we look at our two major cities, though, Edmonton and Calgary, the unadjusted figures are 10.7 percent in Edmonton and a staggering 11.3 percent in Calgary. Now, the previous minister of career development did muse at one time, at least understood that there'd be a problem and talked about a winter works program, but we've heard not one peep from this government since then. My question to the minister is simply this: why is the government doing absolutely nothing to help Albertans in these tough economic times?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we do have some new labour statistics this morning that have been published by Statistics Canada, and we do in fact show a slight decrease in the unemployment rate of the province, which of course is good news. I accept the fact that our economy is not moving as quickly as we would like it to. However, let's bear in mind that we do have some bright signs that we're moving forward.

As far as this government not doing anything, I have to take exception to that. We're spending a great deal of time, effort, and resources to train people to be in a position to take up the jobs as our economy grows. We'll be in a perfect position when our

economy does move, which will be driven by the private sector in this province.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only thing this government is doing is laying off provincial employees and health care workers, which is going to add to the problem. They're sitting there doing absolutely nothing, and that's the point. He didn't answer the question. Nothing about a winter works program.

I want to ask the minister simply this: isn't he aware that putting people back to work is the quickest way to deal with the deficit? In other words, they're paying taxes and not collecting welfare. They have purchasing power, and they're paying taxes. Why doesn't he recognize that fact?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, I think we have to deal with the realities that exist. For the government to move in with very scarce dollars and create employment for the sake of creating employment when actually it all comes out of the same taxpayer's pocket, as opposed to using the initiatives that we have in place, that being to create an environment that will be acceptable and enticing to industry to come to Alberta and to expand and grow and to provide a work force that will be well trained and in a position to occupy those jobs and thereby do something that will be positive in the long term for the economy of our province: we're positioning ourselves to do that. We see some signs on the horizon that indicate that our economy will grow to some significant extent during the 1993 calendar year, as published by the Conference Board of Canada. We're positioning ourselves to take advantage of that.

MR. MARTIN: Isn't that nice, Mr. Speaker. What an important thing for the minister to say to all the unemployed and the potentially unemployed people in this province: there are some positive signs a hundred years from now. What are they going to do now? That's the question.

My question to the minister is simply this: how many more Albertans are going to have to lose their jobs before this government takes any concrete action to put people back to work?

MR. ADY: Well, let's be really clear that we are concerned about the number of unemployed people in this province, but let's also be clear on the fact that Alberta finds itself in a recession which was not of its making. We had a very vibrant economy until we were pulled into a recession by high interest rates, which were driven by central Canada and their policies, that caused inflation to run rampant. We now find ourselves trying to work our way through this thing in a reasonable manner, and we're trying to deal as best we can with the unemployed people, to assist them in the best ways that we can. To create jobs for the sake of creating jobs out of the public coffers is not, in our opinion, the best way to do it at this time.

We're in the month of February. We're about two months away from spring, when hopefully the circumstance will change and employment will pick up. We do have some improvements in employment in some of our major industries: manufacturing; the food and beverage industry is up some 2,000 people in employment; we also have some increases in public administration; and business services has increased by some 3,000 people in the last month. So there are some bright things coming.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second main question, Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: If, but, and hopefully, Mr. Speaker. He says it's not of their making. Wouldn't it be nice to have the money from NovAtel, MPI, Myrias, GSR, and Principal?

### Civil Service Downsizing

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, unemployment is not a problem for government friends. While this government hopes to thin the ranks of Alberta's public employees by offering them pink slips with a happy face, they continue to find jobs for those at the top. Two assistants to the former Labour minister have been parachuted into jobs in the Labour department without competitions. One of the assistants, Tim Wade, was made employment standards officer in Calgary. A grievance protesting these selection processes has already been filed. My question to the Deputy Premier is simply this: how can the Treasurer justify asking public employees to take voluntary severance when this government is finding jobs for its friends without a proper selection process?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm unaware of the details that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has provided with respect to a particular file. If a grievance has been filed, that's certainly appropriate and within the rules of the public service of the province of Alberta, and I'd be happy to look into this matter.

MR. MARTIN: Well, it's happened, Mr. Speaker.

The government made a great to-do about the great savings while eliminating six deputy ministers as part of its reorganization, but we know that at least one person, the former acting deputy minister of career development and employment, found work elsewhere in the government. My question is simply this: would the Deputy Premier confirm that many of the top officials will be keeping their jobs, so the savings to taxpayers will be minimal?

**10:10**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, no, I will not confirm that. Some announcements have been made; additional announcements will be made in the ensuing days. In terms of the downsizing and the reorganization this government has set the course for, if there were vacancies – and there are vacancies from time to time within the public service – and there were people who had some ability and some quality, they have been reassigned and in some cases not assigned at the same level from which they came.

The documentation that the Deputy Premier looking at reorganization made public several days ago showed that there were to be considerable savings, from \$2.3 million to \$2.4 million, by the very nature of the cost of the offices. With the office of the deputy minister comes additional responsibilities. Once that office has been eliminated from existence, those additional responsibilities will also be eliminated from existence, and considerable cost savings will be accrued, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, it's clear what's happening: there's one set of rules for the top people, the friends of the government, and there's another set of rules for the rest of the provincial employees. That's precisely what's happening.

My question to the Deputy Premier is simply this: what is the justice in asking lower level public employees to bear the brunt of this government's failed policies while finding jobs for senior public officials? What's the justification?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the voluntary options program announced earlier this week by myself has found remarkable interest among the employees of the province of Alberta. In fact, to 10 o'clock this morning we've currently received some 947 calls from interested employees. Those employees fill the range from the lowest entry point in the public service, which I will not define, to the second highest entry point in the public service,

which is the assistant deputy ministerial level. That program has been offered to them.

Deputy ministers come in under the order in council appointment list, Mr. Speaker, and they have to be treated differently than the other ones, not in terms of benefits or payouts or anything like that but different in terms of the process by which we deal with their positions. Those who sit and those who receive appointments on the order in council list do so at the pleasure of the Crown, meaning that it's the Lieutenant Governor in Council, or the cabinet, that must make those decisions.

Fairness and equity is being provided to all employees of the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. There's no special set of rules for one group of people as opposed to another group of people.

### Native Criminal Justice

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, every analysis that has been done on aboriginal people in our justice system shows that the criminal justice system continues to fail Metis and Indians in Alberta. We've had the 1978 Kirby report, the 1989 report done by the Task Force on Legal Aid, the 1991 Rolf report, and the 1991 Cawsey report all essentially saying the same thing: that the system continues to fail Metis and Indians. My first question is to the minister responsible for native affairs. Mr. Minister, a working committee was set up by the government to take the Cawsey report and to crystallize issues and matters and move towards action. I'd like to have the minister tell Albertans why that report hasn't been released. It's almost a year old.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, because as you know, as a minister it is one of my high priorities to deal with this issue. I've indicated to this House that the involvement of native people in this area is tied in with some of the issues I've brought up in this House, and that's tied in with a lot of poverty. As you know, our government is working very hard to change that. We are working very closely with native groups. In fact, just yesterday I think Alberta made history again by signing one of the first memorandums of understanding with the Treaty 8, which represents over 20 Indian reserves in the north half of the province. One of the parts of the agreement is to work together with the native groups along with a number of levels of government to make sure that we resolve these problems in the near future.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the minister doesn't know what report I'm talking about, so I'm going to send a copy of the report and file four other copies with the Clerk and ask the minister either to admit that he doesn't know what the report talks about or to stand in this Assembly and explain to Albertans why implementation of that report hasn't taken place.

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, as the solicitor general a few years ago, it was I that called for the report and set the Cawsey commission to work. They did develop an excellent report, which came down with 340 recommendations, and it was immediately discussed with the aboriginal community of this province. The aboriginal leaders of this province stressed very strongly to the government that nothing was to be done on the report until we had in-depth consultation with the aboriginal leaders. That consultation did in fact take place.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the government has not been sitting by doing nothing on this. We have engaged in cultural training. We have engaged in the location of a courthouse on one of the reserves, which is taking place so that justice itself could be

closer to the people. We have appointed an aboriginal judge to the Provincial Court. We have trained correctional officers in Lethbridge from the First Nations, and we have youth justice committees going throughout Alberta now. As well, we have the Kainai correction institute, which is a correctional institute right on the Blood reserve, being run by the Bloods themselves. There's the Yellowhead tribal council correctional agreement, which has been signed. We have a zone 2 regional agreement with the Metis people, and we have a 1992 Tsuu T'ina Nation agreement in respect to corrections as well. This government is proceeding and will continue to proceed on this with as great haste as we can.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the report that I've tabled, that the minister responsible for native affairs doesn't even appear to know about, talks about a consultative process, talks about crystallizing issues, talks about action. One of the key recommendations of Cawsey and of this working paper is that there be a judicial aboriginal commission. The paper talks about two: one for Metis and one for Indians. Mr. Minister, why the delay? Why don't we have these commissions in place?

MR. FOWLER: The whole of the Cawsey report was under the solicitor general and Attorney General as I indicated, which is now the Department of Justice, and is the responsibility of one minister. That minister is not the minister responsible for native affairs; it's the Minister of Justice for this province. We will be dealing with that report in as expeditious a manner as we can. I indicated on the first or second day of being appointed Minister of Justice for this province that native justice was a priority of this government and will continue to be.

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

#### **Paskapoo Slopes**

MRS. B. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. In 1991 Calgary undertook a survey as part of the Heart of the Valley, Calgary's urban park project. Seventy-two percent of the respondents supported acquisition of environmentally sensitive areas. Paskapoo Slopes is just such an area. The province owns a key piece of land in the slopes and has plans to sell off this environmentally sensitive land for yet another housing development. To the Provincial Treasurer: will the minister assure this Assembly that he will prevent the premature sale of this natural park area?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes, but I want to clarify for the hon. member that this property is owned by S C Properties, a stabilization corporation of properties out of the credit union and North West Trust problems. Now I know the meaning of "between a rock and a hard place," because I hear from the hon. colleagues, the brutal and the crackerjacks over there, that we ought to dispose of all of these properties, get rid of them, dump them onto the market at any cost, at any price, yet I hear from a caring and hard-working Calgary-Bow MLA, who's saying: protect this property, make sure that it is carefully looked at and not sold prematurely. I can assure the hon. member that that is the case. This property is a matter that is before the whole rezoning board of the city of Calgary, and before any action is taken, a decision will have to be made on rezoning. Again, the answer to the hon. member's question is yes.

10:20

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Calgary-Bow.

MRS. B. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the Minister of Environmental Protection. A number of constituents from Calgary-Bow, Calgary-West, and Calgary-North West have concerns about the effects of development on these sensitive lands. There is a fear of erosion problems, which could occur when the vegetation is stripped from the slopes. We ask the minister to consider the appropriateness of ordering an EIA on Paskapoo Slopes before any development happens on these sensitive lands.

MR. SPEAKER: Environmental Protection.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Bow bringing this matter to the attention of the House. Environmental impact assessment studies are done when we have a concern about a substantial, significant adverse impact on the environment. The member has mentioned that we are talking about a housing development. She has also mentioned that she has concerns about erosion. I think we have to recognize that we do have a municipality involved here and that the municipality has zoning bylaws, has land-use planning, and within that context would have issues such as storm water and erosion control within their manuals. I would hope, hon. member, that the city of Calgary would be dealing with these particular issues. If you have more specific concerns about severe or significant adverse impacts, I'd certainly be prepared to hear from you.

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

#### **Women's Equality**

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the minister responsible for women's issues. Recently we had reports of this minister of the government making light of a joke about husbands shooting wives and violent images on sexist T-shirts. At a time when all Canadians are concerned about violence against women, we need strong advocates for women rather than someone who advocates a status quo. My question: will this minister now commit to informing herself as to the issues addressed by the Advisory Council on Women's Issues and to advocating strongly for the advancement of women in accord with the recommendations of the advisory council?

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is ill informed. I've never made any jokes, ever, about hatred or whatever she's accusing me of. It's absolutely incorrect. It is my job as minister, of course, to receive input from the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, and I plan on dealing with those issues.

MS M. LAING: Mr. Speaker, I would correct the minister in her hearing. I didn't say she made jokes; I said she made light of jokes.

Because of the work of people who had advocated for the advancement in equality of women, this minister is able to sit in this House. Information about women's place in society, including rates of poverty and the high incidence of sexual harassment, indicates the struggle must continue. As the Advisory Council on Women's Issues has been without a Chair since last June, will this minister now commit to appointing a strong woman with a record of advocacy for women to be the Chair of the council?

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, the Community Development department has a number of responsibilities. There are appoint-

ments waiting in the seniors secretariat, the Multiculturalism Commission, the culture and arts boards, the library boards, the Human Rights Commission, the women's advisory commission, the recreation commission, the Sport Council. All are waiting for appointments, and it is going to happen. I'm dealing with these in a very caring and not hasty manner. All of these positions are equally important, and it is something that I plan on working through in a very short time frame.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-McKnight.

#### Caucus Policy Committees

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is supposed to be open, dependable, and consultative. Instead, we have one-way communication from ministers telling people behind closed doors what their departments are going to do and what their budgets are going to be. What a farce. Last night the standing committee on community services held a so-called public meeting with one day's notice and limited space. Many interested Albertans were left out, looking in through glass doors, completely shut out of the one and only presentation the minister will make. My question is to the minister. Madam Minister, why do you pretend the committee process is open, when little notice was given and there was no space for Albertans, some of whom drove two hours to attend?

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MRS. MIROSH: Well, Mr. Speaker, this member is certainly ill informed. That was an open public meeting. There were about 80 who attended. In my view, they were very, very pleased with the open, consultative process. I stayed behind. I spoke to the people. That member was not there. The people who attended were very pleased. This, in my view, was the best process that this government has ever taken. It's very positive.

MRS. GAGNON: Mr. Speaker, many people were actually turned away and were shut out by the commissionaires.

My second question to the minister is this: would you show Albertans that you don't condone this outrageous arrogance and process on the part of your committee? Will the minister set up further meetings throughout the province, open meetings, meetings with space?

MRS. MIROSH: This member is totally ill informed. As I say, Mr. Speaker, she was not there to see that open, consultative process. This government has been very open. We have open, public forums all the time and plan on continuing that. [interjection] You are absolutely wrong. This is a minister who is very open. I have open forums; I have town hall meetings. This department is very open. I would welcome members opposite to see for themselves instead of hearsay information.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

#### Oil Spills

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday morning the Rainbow pipeline leaked 2,000 barrels of crude oil in an area approximately 50 kilometres northeast of Lesser Slave Lake. My constituents are concerned about this leak in the most beautiful, all-enclosed, sandy-beached lake otherwise known as the jewel of the north. They're concerned regarding the environmental impact

of this leak relative to the health of the people in the area. My question is to the Minister of Energy: can the minister indicate the cause of the spill and its potential impact on my constituents and to my lake?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very unfortunate when these things do happen. The cause of the spill is not yet known. Rainbow Pipe Line personnel have in fact begun cleanup activities. Staff from the Energy Resources Conservation Board and Alberta Environment are in fact on site. I'm pleased to be able to advise that this spill did occur in a low, muskeg area and the spill has been completely contained. We were fortunate to have 25 below zero weather in the Slave Lake area, which also helped to solidify and contain the oil. I am also advised that there is no chance of the oil migrating to any of the waterways in the beautiful riding of Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much. I'm very pleased to see that there's some action already taken.

However, I believe that there are some problems relative to leaks whenever they occur, and I'd like to know whether or not the ERCB's current regulations are adequate to guard against this happening ever again.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, it is normal practice for the Energy Resources Conservation Board to submit a report to me when these unfortunate events occur. I don't expect to receive that report for the next few weeks. However, the ERCB's regulations and legislation are always under review to ensure that the best interests of Albertans are always protected. I can assure this House that if there are any deficiencies in those regulations or legislation, they will be rectified.

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

10:30

#### Telecommunication

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number one issue on the minds of Albertans is the need for creating quality jobs, and the number one industry for creating jobs is in the related fields of computer software, electronic imaging, home entertainment, and telecommunications networks. Recently, however, it was announced by Unitel that they are joining forces with the advanced technology and lower costs of the American giant AT&T to penetrate the Canadian market against Telus and other provincial telecommunications companies. Given the extremely activist approach being taken by the new Democrat Clinton/Gore administration in the United States to foster American advantages in this field, what strategic actions is the minister of economic development here taking to work aggressively with the public and private sectors to ensure that every possible competitive advantage and telecommunications job opportunity stays and grows here in Alberta?

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, the department has been working very actively over a number of years, and this government has been working very actively. The research and development in the telecommunications field that has been done in this province is second to none in Canada, and research and co-operation with the department will continue. There are new firms getting in as we speak. There was an announcement just the other day of a small

firm that has broken into this field, and it's because of that Canadian and Albertan technology that they're doing it.

REV. ROBERTS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that we have a terrific information infrastructure in this province, but the threat now posed by Unitel and AT&T, as the minister well knows, is a massive one.

I want to point out that a glaring competitive disadvantage for us in Alberta and Canada is that lines going into homes for voice communication cannot be used for the transmission of visual images or other expanding computer-driven technologies, whereas they can in the United States and Britain. Will the minister of economic development together with the FIGA minister work with authorities in other provinces to force the CRTC in Ottawa to change these rules which keep Canadian-based companies at a disadvantage and allow thousands of Alberta jobs to be threatened by sophisticated foreign competitors?

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that Telus and Ed Tel are very competitive companies. I will be meeting with them fairly shortly to discuss many issues. One thing about our industry here is that in order to continue to be successful, they have to be competitive with changing technologies. They definitely have worked and will continue to work with us to make sure that as many jobs as possible can be maintained in this province.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

### Provincial Budget

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are justifiably fearful of what this government has planned for the future of health care, education, and other essential services in our province. Grants for hospitals, school boards, municipalities, educational institutions have not yet been announced by this government. However, the track record every year since 1987 is that those announcements have been made very early in January. This is the first year in a long, long time that these announcements have been delayed for so long. Will the Provincial Treasurer confirm that the reason for the delay on these announcements is that his government is deeply divided, racked by indecision, and unable to know in which direction to go, unable to make the crucial decisions that are clearly required right now?

MR. DINNING: No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, this government's inability, Mr. Speaker, to make grant announcements in a timely manner is unfair to local authorities. They can't plan. The government forces them to the wall in terms of their abilities to deliver services to Albertans. This government is simply holding hospitals, school boards, municipalities, universities, and colleges hostage to their indecision. If the Provincial Treasurer is so cocky about his financial plans, why doesn't he do the honourable and fair thing and make those grant announcements to Albertans today? Don't delay another day.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, those sectors – the schools, hospitals, universities, municipalities – know very well that we are going through a process of reviewing our budget, and we do have some serious decisions to make. I'm not out to go through the fear-mongering exercise that my colleague across the way has chosen to pursue. We have some very thoughtful, some very

critical decisions to make, and we are working with our universities, our colleges, our hospitals, our school boards, and our municipalities and asking them for their assistance and their advice in coming to these difficult decisions.

We have a \$2.7 billion deficit this year, and those public-sector institutions want us to eliminate that accumulated deficit and debt as much as all Albertans do. So for us to act precipitously and show what the dollars are going to be as quickly as the ranters and ravers from across the way would want us to – I think Albertans understand that you can't tie your hands that way. What the hon. members across the way are trying to do is say: well, all we ought to do is just continue to fund and fund more and more in the way we've always done things. As our Premier has said, there are a number of matters that are on the table, and we're looking to hospitals, schools, and school boards to work with them and find: how do we do things better in the future; how do we use the existing dollars effectively so that our kids benefit and the people of Alberta benefit?

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

### Health Care System

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that hospitals are so strapped for resources that they're forced to make dramatic cuts that are going to have an impact on health care consumers. Even more frightening is knowing that the long-term effect of these cuts is going to be more profound than is immediately obvious. My question is to the Minister of Health. Will the changes at Caritas, particularly the downgrading of nursing qualifications, affect the hospitals' accreditation?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Certainly not to my knowledge, hon. member. I have to say again that we have to look at groups managing their resources and, I think, managing resources very effectively. There have not been cuts to hospitals in this province. They had a 4 percent increase, in fact, in grants in '92-93. As I indicated yesterday, we have committed to health care in this province over \$4 billion in this fiscal year. What we are asking the deliverers of our system to do is to look at effective ways to deliver this quality system. That is what these groups are indeed doing, and we're working with them to achieve that.

MRS. HEWES: Exactly, Mr. Speaker. We want a quality system. I'm surprised that the minister has not concerned herself with accreditation. Perhaps accreditation is not important to the minister, but it is to Albertans and to consumers of health care.

Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is to the minister responsible for professions and occupations. The changes could mean that individual licensed practical nurses could lose their registration. Is the minister prepared to allow the deterioration of this important health profession?

MR. DAY: There's no deterioration there at all, Mr. Speaker. Any suggestions the hon. member opposite may have to protect that, I'd certainly be willing to look at and try to accommodate.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

### West Glacier Welcome and Information Centre

MR. GOGO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question this morning for the hon. Minister of Economic Development and

Tourism, and it concerns a centre that's been opened in the United States. Members are aware that since 1986 tourism has been a major priority of the government of Alberta, and its main purpose, in my view, has been to attract foreign visitors, certainly visitors from outside Alberta. It's on that basis that I want to put my question. Recently the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services along with the minister of tourism opened a centre in West Glacier, Montana, I believe at a cost of some \$2 million. I think the intent was to use it primarily to attract visitors to Alberta. I wonder if the minister of tourism could advise members of the House what, if any, increase there has been in visitors to Alberta as a result of the expenditure of those public funds in building that centre in West Glacier, Montana.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

10:40

MR. SPARROW: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and very definitely yes to the question. The Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services may want to supplement. We opened the centre last spring, and I believe it's one of the best information centres we've had. There are 1.3 million people or more that go by on Highway 2 through that area. We're trying definitely to get an opportunity for those who are visiting Glacier national park to make the decision early to come up into Alberta. It's been working very successfully. This summer about 500 people a day had been stopping. Over 70,000 people have visited that centre in the first year. Very definitely there has been an impact. If they just increase one out of five visitors for an extra night or an extra day in Alberta, it very, very much has an impact: about \$1.3 million in new dollars being spent because of it this year is our estimate from the department.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. GOGO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister knows, one of the criticisms has been that West Glacier is about half a kilometre off U.S. Highway 2. I'd like to pose the supplementary to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, as Acting Premier. Members will recall that last summer, on the initiative of the Member for Medicine Hat, we as an Assembly – I think by unanimous vote – urged the government to convince Ottawa and the United States to open the border crossing at Carway or the U.S. port of entry called Peigan on a 24-hour basis. My recollection is that that was one of the primary reasons for building that centre at West Glacier. My question to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services as Acting Premier or to the minister of tourism: could he report to the Assembly what changes there have been to increasing the opening hours of the port of entry at Carway from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. to 24 hours?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, last year, in 1992, a number of overtures were made to the federal government by representatives of the Alberta government. The previous Deputy Premier, the MLA for Medicine Hat, certainly has been involved as has the MP, Mr. Ken Hughes. Effective November 1, 1992, there were additional hours added on the United States side at their Peigan crossing that will allow traffic to move northward. There have also been adjustments made so the traffic can increase southwards from Alberta into Montana. It's not resolved so that there is 24-hour crossing in place yet, but it's something that considerable efforts are being expended on to ensure this happens.

I think the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism is a bit modest in pointing out what the potential is for West Glacier. In fact, my understanding is that there are some 1.7 million to 1.8 million Americans who travel the Valley of the Sun road. Our West Glacier tourist information centre is very, very strategically located. A lot of Americans have misconceptions about Canada, and unless you can attract their interest in their country, they will not come into this country. So what we have done is rather unique: building, in concert with the federal government, this facility in the United States to attract Americans to come to Alberta. All reports are that it will be very, very successful.

#### Fuel Contamination Incident

MR. DOYLE: Mr. Speaker, it's been a year and a half now since the government released its report on the tainted fuel incident at Hinton. The report came up empty, blaming the lack of a proper investigation at the time of the incident and the absence of effective co-ordination of the actions of the responsible government departments at that time. The criminal investigation, however, was left open on their files. Will the Minister of Justice specify to the Assembly precisely what steps have been taken to ensure there is better co-ordination and if there have been any developments in the ongoing investigation over the past 18 months? Have they found these tanks anywhere?

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, a number of questions in that question. To the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. The tanks have not been located. The file has not been closed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the investigation is still in an open state. As I indicated, the file has not been closed at this time.

MR. DOYLE: Mr. Speaker, the victims of this poisoning continue to suffer because of it. Upwards of a dozen people remain seriously affected by this exposure. Despite its responsibility in the matter the government continues to deny any compensation apart from minimal WCB benefits to the few of these victims who are affected. Can the minister of occupational health and safety consider the government's position and offer some sort of compensation to those victims who continue to suffer serious effects almost three years after this incident?

MR. DAY: There's a fairly well-defined process, Mr. Speaker, that people can follow in looking for compensation of various sorts. In this particular incident, with the people affected, I'd be happy to hear from the member opposite specific approaches that have already been taken that haven't been satisfactory and suggestions that possibly could be more satisfactory.

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

#### Special Waste Treatment Centre

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the fact that the government of Alberta contributes as much as \$30 million per year to the operation of the Swan Hills waste management facility, this government has never told Albertans how much real business revenue is earned by that facility. To the Minister of Environmental Protection: when will the minister tell us how much real business revenue is generated by the Swan Hills waste management facility on an annual basis?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As hon. members are aware, Swan Hills is operated through the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, and that is a joint venture of Chem-Security and the province of Alberta. We have a process for tabling information about ventures that the province is involved in through our budgetary process, and we'll continue to do that in the future.

MR. MITCHELL: Never tabled anything about how much money's been generated by this facility. Same old, tired arguments covering up the same old, tired problems.

Mr. Speaker, now that the agreement with the private-sector partner in this facility is up for renewal, will the minister ensure that the new contract will require that figures on real business revenues be released to the public as a matter of course? Why should we have to make a special request in this Legislature for something they deserve to see?

MR. EVANS: That sounds like two questions to me, Mr. Speaker, but I'll certainly give some information on the negotiations that are ongoing. The hon. member is quite correct that there is a new agreement that is being negotiated. I've had some preliminary discussions with the operators of the Swan Hills facility. It's my position that it's very important that we enter into a new agreement with the contractor, with the operator of that facility, because that facility is extremely important to the well-being of Albertans. It disposes of hazardous waste. It keeps that kind of waste from being stored, from being dropped into our environment, whether it's into the ground or into water courses or whatever. I will certainly consider in the context of what the final agreement is going to be what kind of information should be made public and what kind of information would not be made public because of commercial confidentiality.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
head: **Second Reading**

**Bill 56**  
**Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1993**

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I stand before the Assembly and move second reading of Bill 56.

Mr. Speaker, what this Bill does is legislate the Committee of Supply discussions that took place this past week on supplementary appropriation to fund a number of departments and in particular our social services department, because of increased caseloads, as well as higher than expected enrollments in our schools requiring an additional sum of \$26 million, as well as the teachers' retirement fund changes.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that the Assembly has debated supplementary estimates I believe since 1985-86. It is in keeping with our desire to bring forward publicly, to justify this increased spending to the Legislative Assembly, to Albertans and to ask the Assembly to approve these expenditures rather than doing it through the special warrant process around the cabinet table. It is our hope that we will minimize the number of special warrants between now and the end of the fiscal year, although it is expected that there will be at least one further special warrant required to approve interim supply before we actually go to the Legislature some time in the new fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to again move second reading of Bill 56.

**10:50**

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

MR. CHIVERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by congratulating the minister on having chosen to bring before the Assembly for a change a very substantial amount of proposed government spending. I think it's an important new direction.

Having said that, I want also to put on record my concerns with respect to the procedures of this Assembly in dealing with a matter which is of great public importance and is extremely crucial to the well-being of the province. I'm speaking here of the limited amount of time that is given to the Assembly to consider estimates that are placed before it. I think that the three-day limitation with respect to these estimates illustrates very well the nature of the difficulty that is faced by members sitting opposite with respect to the estimates procedure. Indeed, my area is the Justice portfolio and, as the minister will be aware, we have not even had an opportunity to make any comments with respect to that area of the estimates, and indeed the majority of the estimates have not had an opportunity to be canvassed by members of the Assembly. So in congratulating the minister on this new departure, which I think is significant, I would ask him also to entertain some consideration about procedures that should be followed in the future with respect to allowing an adequate time for discussion and debate of estimates in the Legislative Assembly.

I want now to turn my attention to the area that concerns me most directly, and that is the appropriation for Support for Legal Aid, which is an appropriation of \$6.3 million. I would like to again put on the record the concerns that I've addressed on the two occasions I've had the privilege of addressing the estimates in the Attorney General's department before. I think these supplementary estimates have now borne evidence of the nature of the problem. There is a severe crisis with respect to the funding of legal aid, and I want to commend the government for having brought forward this additional and much needed and well-justified appropriation for the funding of legal aid.

Having said that, I want to reiterate the comments that I've made previously in the Assembly with respect to the reality of that crisis. It has been known for many years that there is an ongoing and increasing crisis in terms of the funding of legal aid, and it is one that should not come as any surprise to us. It certainly comes as no surprise to me that this supplementary appropriation for legal aid is needed. Indeed when I spoke to the estimates last year, I made the point that the appropriation at the time seemed inadequate to meet the reality of increasing demand, which I understand for the year ended March of 1992 is again a 25 percent increase in demand. Likewise the previous year there was a similar increase in demand. I would ask the minister what the projection is for increasing demand this year.

Also there is the difficulty with respect to falling revenue. Now, in 1992 it was legislated that the contribution by the Law Foundation would be 25 percent of its previous year's interest on the solicitor trust accounts. As a result of the reality of the marketplace, that interest rate has fallen substantially in the past year. Since it's based on the previous year's interest earnings, it is clear that there is going to be at least a \$600,000 decrease in the amount of that contribution in the coming year. I realize that this is anticipatory, but I would ask the minister what steps are being taken with respect to dealing with the reality of increasing demand and falling revenue in respect of the forthcoming year.

Now, the purpose of legal aid, Mr. Speaker, is of course to provide equal access to needed legal services, equality before the

law, and to satisfy the need for and the right to legal representation for people who do not have the means to provide for themselves. The delivery of legal aid is particularly crucial in the area of our aboriginal people. I want to go back to the Cawsey commission report. There were many recommendations with respect to concerns about the delivery of legal services through the legal aid program raised in that report, and there were certain recommendations made in the report. I would like to request of the minister an update with respect to the status of those recommendations regarding delivery of legal aid services to Indian and Metis people in the province of Alberta.

A concern that has been brought to me on a number of occasions by legal personnel that work within the legal aid system has to do with the delay in the payment of accounts rendered to legal aid and the delay in taxation. I'm wondering what steps are being taken with respect to that matter.

I see that the present appropriation also includes as part of it funding for a pilot project for staff lawyers. I understand that that program has been ongoing with at least two staff lawyers since 1990, and this is anticipating additional funding in that area. I'm wondering what the breakdown is, what portion of the appropriation of \$6.3 million is to be devoted to this pilot project and what proportion is to be devoted to a grant towards the cost of administering the legal aid system. There is, as I'm sure the minister will appreciate, some concern amongst members of the legal profession who participate by providing services through the legal aid program with respect to the impact this may have on the delivery of legal aid services in the province of Alberta. There is a feeling and, I submit, a well-justified pride that the program in Alberta has been one of the finest and most cost efficient in the country. I would ask that the minister address some of these concerns. I'm sure they have also been addressed to him.

Having said that, I would also request information as to whether there is any intention to expand the services provided in the duty counsel area in terms of staff counsel, whether or not that is one of the areas that the pilot project may be addressing. My understanding from having spoken with members of the profession involved in delivery of legal services through the legal aid system is that there is support for that kind of initiative, and it is felt that that could be a cost-saving endeavour.

Mr. Speaker, I want to raise again the concern that I've addressed on several occasions in the Legislative Assembly, and that is the concern with respect to the ongoing refusal to access available federal funding with respect to civil legal aid. I hope that the minister will have an opportunity to address this. I want to be clear on the specific rationale for the government not accessing that funding. I understand it has something to do with the extent of legal aid coverage in the province of Alberta. My understanding is that although there might be additional expenses in order to comply with the federal requirements in order to access that funding, on a cost/benefit analysis it should be of financial benefit to the province to comply with the federal conditions, the eligibility requirements. Indeed, if that is the case, I can see little, if any, justification for not accessing that funding.

**11:00**

I understand also that by agreement amongst the tripartite participants in the legal aid system in Alberta there is to be a tariff review in 1993. We all know that one of the consequences of the last tariff review was increased costs of the system, and I'm concerned as to what the implications of the agreed upon tariff review in 1993 are likely to be for the system. I might say, Mr. Speaker, that with respect to the revenue that has been generated by the legal aid system in the province, I've had an opportunity

to look at the recovery program, and I see that there seems to have been greater attention paid to this and that has produced some dividends with respect to the amount of revenue that's been brought in under the recovery program. I think the staff of the legal aid system in Alberta run an extremely efficient shop, and I think they are to be congratulated for the dedicated service that they provide to Albertans in need of legal representation.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to raise another financial concern, and that has to do with the outstanding certificate liabilities. These are certificates that have been issued by legal aid but are not billed. I understand that as of March 31, 1992, the estimate as to the outstanding liability for unbilled certificates was something in the neighbourhood of \$17 million. That's more than half a year's funding at the present level of funding including this new appropriation. It seems to me that is a matter that we need to be concerned about for the future. I'm wondering what the projection for that outstanding unbilled certificate liability is for the year 1993.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion and before I relinquish the floor, I want to welcome the minister back to this portfolio. It was a pleasure to work with him in the past. Although we do not necessarily agree on the approaches in many areas, I do respect his willingness to co-operate. I look forward to hearing his responses to the questions that I've raised. My ultimate last word is: unlike the previous year, I fully expect to actually receive some answers from the questions on estimates.

Thank you.

**MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**MR. DICKSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I should say initially that my specific comments are going to be focused on the legal aid item, the support for legal aid, but I want to join with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in expressing my frustration that the truncated debate dealing with Committee of Supply didn't afford us opportunity to deal with this important Justice issue. I also, sir, am heartened that the Premier saw fit to appoint to the position of Justice minister the incumbent. If our justice system has a blind spot, and indeed I think it has more than one, certainly the treatment of natives, our aboriginal people, is such a blind spot, and I think all members of the Legislature recognize and respect the work that the current Justice minister has done, particularly during the 1992 constitutional negotiations. I believe he genuinely understands the issues, and I think he genuinely is anxious to see change in that area. I'm anxious to work with him in that respect.

Mr. Speaker, I note that a key part of the proposal is for a new means of delivering legal aid, a pilot project for three years. I think this raises a need that has been perhaps discussed in this House before, and it is to, in some fashion, divorce public prosecutions as much as possible from the other part of the mandate, the other responsibilities of the minister responsible for Justice. I think this becomes a more important issue now that we have rolled into one both the solicitor general portfolio and the Attorney General portfolio. I'd urge the Minister of Justice to consider creating a director of public prosecutions. If we don't take some meaningful steps, symbolic as well as functional, to protect and insulate public prosecutions, we're going to be in a situation in this jurisdiction where our top law enforcement person is also the top judicial authority, and I think there's potential for an appearance of political interference in what has to be an arm's-length process; namely, public prosecutions.

With respect to the pilot project that is being proposed, I think we have to recognize that we have in Alberta perhaps the most effective delivery system in the country in terms of providing legal aid. It certainly is one of the least expensive legal aid programs in Canada. I presume, Mr. Speaker, there are some strong and compelling reasons to look at an alternate model, and I think all members of this Legislature are interested in more cost-effective ways of delivering service, but I think we have yet to hear the case. I think we have yet to hear compelling reasons for an alternate means of delivering legal service.

With respect to the delivery system, Mr. Speaker, our legal aid system is, I think, the fourth lowest in terms of per capita cost in the country. Ontario's system is \$9.28 per capita. B.C. is \$5.64 per capita. Alberta is only \$3.70 per capita. On a cost basis it looks like the legal aid system we currently have is something of a bargain. We also have a much higher rate of participation of the private bar in our legal aid system than in any other jurisdiction, certainly much higher than Ontario or B.C.

Now, prior to 1991, Mr. Speaker, the rate paid to lawyers on legal aid certificates was \$45 per hour, and as I recall, that had been the same rate for about six years up until 1991. It was increased in 1991 to \$61 per hour, but of course that wasn't for all services provided by counsel but only for certain services on a very carefully prescribed tariff. The average earnings by a lawyer doing legal aid work in 1992, I understand, were about \$7,000 per annum, so we're not talking about enormous amounts of money.

On July 1, 1992, there were significant cutbacks in the tariff rates. There was a reduction in certain kinds of services that before had been compensable and then ceased to be compensable. One of the concerns of that, Mr. Speaker, is that in this province many of our senior counsel, many of the counsel best experienced to deal with serious criminal matters in particular are finding that the tariff rate brings them to a point where they start shedding this kind of work and doing less and less legal aid work. My concern, of course, is that the overall effectiveness of our legal aid system may suffer if that's allowed to continue. My point is that I'm opposed to jettisoning. I'm opposed to throwing out a legal aid system which relies on the private bar unless we see some clear advantage to Albertans. It's not a question of an advantage to lawyers; it's an advantage to Albertans, the consumer of the service.

## 11:10

If we proceed with the pilot project, I think it's important that we respect the right of all Albertans to fair treatment, and I think it's important if we go with a duty counsel system, even on a pilot project basis, Mr. Speaker, that we ensure that the staff lawyers are paid and resourced at a level comparable to Crown prosecutors. I think that's important in a symbolic way. I also think it has a functional advantage.

I also am going to ask the Minister of Justice to confirm and assure us that this three-year pilot project is going to be evaluated aggressively, rigorously, and I think a rigorous assessment can perhaps best be assured if we have representation from the independent bar on any evaluation panel as part of any evaluative process.

Mr. Speaker, I also raise another concern I have which I don't think is being addressed by the Minister of Justice or the previous solicitor general or Attorney General, and that has to do with the governance of legal aid in Alberta. Why does legal aid, sir, find its authority in the Legal Profession Act? Historical accident? Administrative convenience? I suspect it's some of both. What we've looked at for at least the last five or six years is this peculiar three-legged creation. We have the Law Society

represented by the benchers, we have the Attorney General, now Minister of Justice, and then we have the Legal Aid Society. We've watched over the last five or six years these three different sectors wrestling with changes to legal aid, trying to make sure our legal aid system is effective and reasonably frugal. I submit that it's a process that is pretty unsatisfactory. I know the benchers of the Law Society are not keen to have this role. It seems to me that as long as we perpetuate this process, we skew the reality. The reality, sir, is that it's not lawyers that have a responsibility to provide legal service or ensure that all Albertans have legal service; it's a public responsibility, much in the same way that our health care is a public responsibility. It's not a responsibility we can sign simply to the medical profession or one of the actors in the delivery of service. I think there's a perception with the system we have now that it's the legal profession that bears the burden or the responsibility when it should be on the government.

Now, it's my respectful submission that the minister ought to seriously look at creating a separate, fresh, enabling legislation for legal aid. This is the case in, I think, most other provinces and certainly all of the other larger provinces. We have a separate statute. It's taken out of the Legal Profession Act, and it's on a stand-alone basis. It clarifies the lines of accountability, and then there's a very direct line between the board of directors of Legal Aid and the Legislative Assembly through the Minister of Justice. The legal profession still has opportunity to participate in the process, but they're not one of the decision-makers, and I think that kind of change is needed, sir.

I draw to the attention of the minister and the House: all I'm speaking of are things that had been recommended by the 1989 task force report on legal aid, recommendations 49 to 52.

Sir, there are serious shortcomings in our legal aid system. We have the highest refusal rate in Canada, and it strikes me as being somewhat perverse, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said moments ago, that we have clearly the highest cost recovery of any legal aid system in Canada. We recover more money from litigants than any other jurisdiction in Canada, yet at the same time we have the highest refusal rate. In other words, more Canadians in this province who apply for legal aid are refused than in any other province. The statistics I've looked at show that 16 percent of all applications for legal aid in Alberta are refused. The refusal rate is less than 10 percent in at least five other provinces including Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Northwest Territories, and Saskatchewan. Our income criteria have not been revised for a large number of years. In Alberta if you're a single parent with two children, you're ineligible for legal aid if your gross monthly income exceeds \$1,200. I submit that the income criteria we use, the threshold test is just hopelessly out of date, it's hopelessly unrealistic, and the result is that Albertans who require legal assistance and can't afford a lawyer on a private retainer basis end up being denied access to our courts. That should be a concern of all members. So we have a shrinking number of people eligible for legal aid.

I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that our province still, for reasons that aren't clear to me either, stubbornly refuses to access Canada assistance plan funding. Manitoba had taken a similar position up until a year or so ago. Manitoba saw the light. All that was required were, I think, three additional lines, a couple of modest changes to the application form, and as a consequence they were then able to access substantial dollars which all Canadians contribute through their tax money. I'm still at a loss, Mr. Speaker, to understand why this province stubbornly refuses to access those funds. In fact, I think Prince Edward Island is the only other Canadian province that doesn't access that money. I think Alberta taxpayers, sir, are interested and I think

they are also entitled to know why we leave that money on the table.

With respect to civil legal aid, we have to ensure our legal aid system recognizes that we've got an increasing number of immigration cases, a large number of refugee hearings now. We have an increasing number of family law cases. Those people require legal assistance, and we have to ensure we have a responsive legal aid system.

Mention has already been made by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona of the situation where Alberta Law Foundation income was tapped; 25 percent of it was diverted to legal aid. Sir, that siphoning off of 25 percent of Alberta Law Foundation revenue has had an enormous adverse impact on a large number of agencies in this province that provide public legal education. Mr. Speaker, I regret that the people that are served by public legal education tend to be the marginalized part of our community. They tend to be people who are functionally illiterate. They tend to be people who are immigrants and new Canadians. They tend to be single parents. They tend to be people who have difficulty accessing the regular resources that many other Albertans take for granted. I think that's a concern. I can only encourage the minister to consider restoring that money, that funding that's been diverted from the Alberta Law Foundation because what you're seeing is a large number of Albertans losing the value, the benefit that can be provided by an effective law foundation.

My other suggestion, sir, is that we take the Alberta Law Foundation - I think it's wholly inappropriate to view it as an agent of government policy, and that's clearly what's happened now. My respectful submission is that that also ought to be hived off, removed from the current Legal Profession Act and separate enabling legislation created.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, dealing with the Cawsey report, there were some 12 specific recommendations that the Cawsey commission came up with in terms of making our legal aid system more accessible to our aboriginal people. I've read the consultation document that was tabled in question period, but I'm still waiting for some detailed response from the Department of Justice and the Minister of Justice telling which of those recommendations relative to legal aid in particular and the other recommendations in general have been implemented. If there are problems, can that not be shared with all members of this Legislature?

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

#### 11:20

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. [interjection] The Chair did see Edmonton-Meadowlark first. I'm sorry, hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. MITCHELL: I know that the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place may actually get the name Edmonton-Meadowlark after this boundary reorganization, but I'm going to run in the real Edmonton-Meadowlark, which is now going to be called Edmonton-Manning.

MR. FOX: Edmonton-Preston.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. Edmonton-Ernie, we're going to call it, just to draw that distinction. We don't want to make any mistakes about that, although I'm not sure that Mr. Bogle didn't.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address this interim supply Bill, the interim appropriation Bill. The fact of the matter is that I was hopeful. I'd seen the former Minister of Education, the new Treasurer, operate relatively effectively in his previous portfolio.

I had seen the news reports, the public relations spin, the doctors of torque, as the Premier is now referring to his public relations media, argue that this government was new, that this government was going to be different, that somehow Albertans were going to be launched on an era of freshness and openness and, to use the Treasurer's term, honesty, which he referred to when he announced his special review commission: it's about time we had an honest review of the finances of this government. I would have to agree with him on that, but I would have to ask: where were he and his 10 cabinet colleagues who were in the previous cabinet when, of course, they were by definition or by implication giving us something less than an honest review of what in fact the fiscal conditions were of this province?

Mr. Speaker, I have been disappointed. The fact is that if a government were ever to be new and to be fresh and to be open, one of the key areas where that would be reflected would be in its fiscal policy: the manner in which it budgets, the manner in which it discloses budgetary information, the manner in which it handles itself fiscally. Clearly, this is the first opportunity upon which we would see, in this particular Bill, whether or not that kind of newness and openness, as it should be reflected through a fiscal plan, would be reflected in this Bill. Well, it's not.

There are a number of criteria that I think would distinguish a government as being new and open and that Albertans would expect a new and open government to reflect. One is simply access to information: honest reflection of what the facts are, releasing information that we have in the past been unable to receive. I don't see that there is change in that regard, Mr. Speaker. In fact, this very morning I got up and I asked the new Minister of Environmental Protection: could he tell us how much real revenue is generated by the Swan Hills waste management facility year after year of our subsidizing it to the tune of \$30 million a year? He used the same tired old argument that is always used in this Legislature and has been since I have been here, for seven years; that is, put a question on the Order Paper. Well, the fact is that we do that time and time again and we do not get answers.

I asked, Mr. Speaker, if it were a problem that is created by the nature of the relationship between the government and the private-sector firm which this government subsidized to the tune of \$30 million a year. Is it a problem of the relationship in the contract? I asked: that contract is up for renewal; will that be changed? Could they write into that contract a provision to have that information released? The minister in the same old way that we have heard time and time again, year after year after year in this Legislature, declined to open up the process. There is not a new openness or a new access to information.

Accounting for Softco. It is as though we have Dick Johnston: the sequel. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that Softco is a company with a \$142 million loan guaranteed by none other than the people, the province, the government of Alberta. It loses an average of \$41 million a year, and it only has \$125 million in questionable assets. Why is it, under the new accrual accounting procedure, Mr. Speaker, that the Treasurer does not acknowledge that that \$142 million is not a loan to be guaranteed by the government but a loss to be written off by it and acknowledged at the moment that it is understood to be a loss? These figures at this particular moment undeniably dictate that it is a loss. Why is it that the Treasurer doesn't write it off and tell us that he has just booked another \$142 million loss? It sounds as though we are back in last June: the same old Treasurer, the same old lack of proper accounting.

Similarly, they carry on the books \$49 million in share value that they hold in Softco. They continue to say that it's worth \$49

million. Softco is insolvent. It is not worth \$49 million. It is worth less than zero because we'd guaranteed a \$142 million loan which it doesn't have the resources to pay off. That's another \$49 million loss that should be written down. The predecessor, seven years of it, wouldn't do that. They'd find a way to account differently, to put things away, to delay, to not acknowledge. Under a new government, the one that the new Premier says that he is creating, we would expect a change in those kinds of accounting processes. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we have not seen any such change.

Similarly, there is really never a specific acknowledgment in public, in this Legislature of what the true deficit is for last year. We got new figures December 24, the day before Christmas. I wonder why that particular day would be chosen. We heard that the deficit wasn't \$1.5 billion; it was \$2.3 billion. Recently in the announcement of the interim supply information the government acknowledges publicly and emphasizes the figure \$2.7 billion, but of course, Mr. Speaker, it's only the general revenue fund deficit that is \$2.7 billion. It's not as though the capital fund isn't money spent by this government, and it's not as though it doesn't have a deficit, because it does have a deficit, and it is expenditure by this government every bit as much as expenditure in the general revenue fund is expenditure. The deficit again specified as \$2.7 billion by the Treasurer this morning is not \$2.7 billion; it is over \$3 billion. If this were a government of a new era, we would see the figures and the government wouldn't be afraid to speak about them.

Mr. Speaker, we see a revenue committee being structured. We all want more public input, and perhaps that will solve something, but it denies what the real problem was. The real problem was that everybody knew that the revenue projections in preceding years were too high. Even the staff that were giving information to the Treasurer knew that those projections were too high. We don't have to structure some committee to tell us that revenue projections were too high, because they knew what the real revenue was. All they have to do, in fact, is be a new government, a more open government, a government that is not afraid to be accountable and take responsibility and accept a realistic figure.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we see last night another public relations exercise, and that is, to open up the process to allow arts groups to come in and meet with the minister. Well, it didn't happen the way that it was being billed to have happened. One day's notice, a closed door after 43 people got in the room, and 50 or 60 people were turned away. In fact, the chairman wouldn't allow people to stand. They had to have a seat. If that's a new openness, I am very, very surprised because it isn't a new openness. What it is is a new public relations effort to try and convince people in some hollow way of an openness. One critical feature of a new government that you would think would be reflected in this budgetary process would be openness and access to information, and it simply hasn't occurred. It's the same old tired gang giving us the same old tired excuses.

Second, Mr. Speaker, if we were to see some newness, we would expect to see a fiscal plan to get this fiscal nightmare under control. For seven years we haven't seen a fiscal plan that would be typified by anything other than the term "spend, spend, spend." We still don't have a plan. What we have is a promise for June or July. We don't have a date. I can't even understand how they can bring in a budget in March or April without having a plan, but we're being told we'll get a plan sometime in the future. We've been given one feature of that plan, and that would be its deadline. However, even that deadline hasn't been specified clearly. The Premier has in the past said that it would be in 1996 that we would balance the budget. His Treasurer several days ago said:

no, no, no, no, no; it'll be 1997. Twenty hours after the Treasurer said that it would be 1997, the Premier calls a press conference and says: oh, no, no, no, no; I'm not certain exactly when it will be. Two hours after that the Treasurer insists and respecifies: nope; it's going to be 1997.

### 11:30

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that even something as basic to a fiscal plan as a deadline on balancing the budget hasn't been specified clearly in any way, shape, or form by this government. We simply do not have a plan. The Member for Calgary-Elbow, the Premier, threw out this idea yesterday about how he's going to address the deficit. It has a nice ring to it, and of course it hits that very important point about job creation. That is the most important issue in this province today, and everybody acknowledges it. The Premier is of course trying to lever that for political advantage. He says that the way to address the deficit generally is to get people working. Again, he's not saying that the way to address the deficit is to do something differently; i.e., for the government to take responsibility for what it's done to create the deficit or for what it's done to create a huge and spiraling debt. Instead he says that it is to get people working. That is a laudable objective, but it will not be the key way or the only way or a general way to get the deficit solved.

The deficit the previous year has been acknowledged to be over \$3 billion. If we doubled the number of people working in this province and they earned the same collective salaries as the people who are today working in this province, do you know how much extra income tax would be raised, Mr. Speaker? Not \$3 billion to handle the deficit: \$2.6 billion. You could double the number of people working, and you would not solve this deficit problem. If that indicates anything, it indicates how huge the hole is that this government has dug for the people of Alberta. In classic premierial fashion, this Premier has said: wait a minute, it's not really our fault; it's not really something that we're going to have to do to solve this problem. We're not going to acknowledge that we've got another \$1.1 billion at least in loan guarantees hanging out there, and who knows what the liability is. We're not going to acknowledge that maybe NovAtel created the problem or maybe excessive expenditure to buy votes created the problem. No, no; we're going to say that the one thing to do is to create jobs. Jobs must be created for all kinds of reasons: to create hope and vision and a sense of the future for people in this province. But creating jobs will not be the manner in which any government of this province will be able to wrestle this deficit under control. Double the number of jobs in this province? You might double the income tax, and that still would not solve the deficit problem.

Mr. Speaker, I believe what we have is worse than no plan. What we have is paralysis. We have a government that is trying to say that it's new and distance itself from the past, but it's caught in this political vice where it can take no action because it is paralysed by the fear of precipitating an outcome in the upcoming election, which it is afraid to precipitate. What it needs to do is call an election – that won't be the party running this government – so that we can get a government that will be in a position to begin to make the kinds of decisions that must be made to get the fiscal management of this province under control, to begin to develop jobs and create an economy that will create a future for the people of this province.

Of course, it's not as though the government hasn't been busy, Mr. Speaker. Oh, they have been busy. They have been creating issues to try and distract us people from the real issues. They've got the minister responsible for whatever myriad of things she seems to be responsible for, Community Development, talking

about: let's do away with the Human Rights Commission. That has an interesting cachet, she would think. That creates debate and exposure for issues other than financial issues, although they try and couch it in financial issues by saying: we'll do away with it and save \$1.5 million; we've only got another \$2,999,000,000 to go, but we're going to focus on that because it will create political profile for an issue that will distract people from the real issue, which is the failure of this government to properly manage this province fiscally. If that isn't enough, then the Minister of Family and Social Services says: "It's okay, Mr. Premier; I'll help the problem. I'll distract further. I will exploit the issue of social assistance recipients with my 'give them a bus pass and send them home' initiative." Clearly a province and people in a province have a moral obligation to tell people elsewhere whether or not there are jobs here, but they don't have a right to exploit that politically in the way that it was exploited. It is merely distraction from an important issue which is one they don't want to address.

**Point of Order  
Imputing Motives**

MR. DAY: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour is rising on a point of order.

MR. DAY: Clearly a violation of 23(i) in the Standing Orders in terms of alleging certain motives. When a member is talking about exploitation, especially of the poor, as openly as he is, when he's talking about honesty and this type of thing, and we're talking about a person that doesn't even have the honesty to put in his own résumé, which he publicly distributes, that he used to be vice-president of Principal - I hope the media downstairs are listening this time. He has the nerve to stand up and talk about exploiting people and not giving the truth. It's not only a shame; it's in contravention of 23(i) of Standing Orders.

**Debate Continued**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue by pointing out that further to my point that this government fails to reflect in any way, shape, or form through this budgetary process that it is new or that it is different or that it is what claims to be somehow fresh and open is the argument that it still doesn't have a plan. In fact, one of its key elements of its fiscal plan was the Spending Control Act. What a dismal failure that Act has been. It hasn't changed in its level of success or failure since the "change" in government; it has simply remained the same. The fact is that we now have announced in this interim supply budget that they have gone \$189 million over in expenditures and above the 2.5 percent cap that the Spending Control Act placed on them - loosely, I should say - in the first place. So not only have they gone 2.5 percent over, which I think is about \$250 million, but they have also incurred an additional \$189 million in expenditure. That element, if it could be called that, of a plan, the Spending Control Act, has been nothing more than a public relations exercise which in substance is a dismal failure.

I should also like to point out that there are days when I am somewhat encouraged, in fact, if I might say, Mr. Speaker, that this particular Premier hasn't imposed his version of a fiscal plan, because when I look at his record in the city of Calgary, I become extremely concerned. This Premier when he was in his former position as mayor of Calgary took over the city when it had \$400 million in debt. When he left - and he's not putting this in his résumé, of course - it had \$1 billion in debt. This hard-nosed,

businesslike, bottom-line-driven kind of Premier in this new government more than doubled, by two and one-half times, the debt that the people of Calgary are currently being burdened by. If we put that on a per capita basis compared to Edmonton, Edmonton's debt now is \$495 per capita; Calgary's debt is \$1,500 per capita. I would argue that it is almost a relief that this Premier hasn't brought in his kind of fiscal plan, because what we don't need, heaven help us, is a two and a half times increase in the debt of this province from now, and we certainly don't need a per capita debt that somehow has tripled over a decade.

**11:40**

Mr. Speaker, what we need is a new kind of government. What we need is new openness, a new fiscal plan, and what we do not have is either of those elements reflected in this interim appropriation Bill. It is a classic core failure by this government. They have had a chance to be different. They have had a chance to change, and they have altered absolutely nothing. They are the same old gang doing the same old thing with the same old tired arguments and the same old lack of fiscal control. If anything is embodied in this Act, it is fundamental lack of fiscal control and fundamental denial that somehow it is their responsibility to do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot and I will not support this Bill.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's always enjoyable on a Friday morning to participate in a debate. To participate in the debate this morning with the very innovative and exciting new approach taken by the government in terms of putting forth its agenda, I think that we should just, first of all, set the framework for this. There have been remarkable changes in the land of Alberta in the last number of months: an openness, a new wave in the right direction, a way with respect to positioning in the involvement of the citizenry of this province of Alberta. Among the new innovations that occurred at this minisession of the Legislative Assembly was this process of bringing forth these estimates in the manner in which they were done, and I think the Provincial Treasurer should certainly be congratulated for that. This has never happened before, to my knowledge, in the history of the Legislature of the province of Alberta: that in fact a government would bring forth additional estimates, supplementary estimates, and bring them to the Legislative Assembly and in fact devote time to the discussion of them. That is unique, and that is reform minded, and that's open minded, and that's an innovation that certainly should be put in the perspective which it all is.

It's always a joy as well to hear all members participate in the debate in terms of the estimates, and I certainly want to congratulate the members who have participated in the last three days of debate with respect to the estimates by way of committee. Now we're into the appropriation Bill, and certainly over the next several days there'll be additional opportunities for all members to bring forth some new ideas.

Mr. Speaker, part of the change, of course, is the apparent downsizing that's already been announced, downsizing with respect to the reduction in the size of Executive Council, downsizing with respect to senior officials associated with the province of Alberta. What's really remarkable to me: if I count up the number of desks that are in the so-called front row, there has even been a reduction in the number there as well. When I look at the reduction from 26 or 27 members of Executive Council to 16 or 17, whether or not you include the Premier in it, I see seven new members of Executive Council. I see 17 former colleagues that are no longer in Executive Council. If ever there has been a face change in a government, this is the one that occurred in December

of 1992 and January of 1993, the most remarkable change really since the election of 1971.

However, when I look across the way at the so-called front row of the Official Opposition and the front row of the third party in the Assembly, you know, I see the same faces that I've seen before, exactly the same, sitting exactly where they were. It's quite remarkable to me how hon. members of the opposition stand up and say: there's nothing different; they're all the same. Well, Mr. Speaker, factually, of course, there has been remarkable change – factually, not hypothetically. I'm not talking from one's own perspective without putting forth the truth. I see remarkable men and women of outstanding ability seated throughout the ranks of the government caucus, all playing a very, very important role in the deliverance of service to the people of Alberta. Again, I say with some degree of sadness that there was an opportunity, quite frankly, for the opposition parties to do some adjustments within their own ranks. They chose not to do that. It's the same individuals coming forth with, quite frankly, the same questions that they asked six months ago, two years ago, and three years ago. [interjections] It is again strange to me from a factual point of view that there seems to be – I'm not sure what's happening here, but there seems to be some movement – the same arrangement.

I've always been impressed with the articulation skills of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, always been impressed with his articulation skills. Unfortunately, that impression stops, though, when you really see the gears go into place, because oftentimes what emanates out of a vocal chord doesn't really connect with what comes out of that cranium and what's deposited in the cranium. It would be nice one of these days to see the connection: that in fact when the verbalizing comes in, it's in gear with the thought process, Mr. Speaker.

So I think it's very important from a factual point of view to repeat again where the changes have been, Mr. Speaker, and where the changes have not been. I think that's really, really important.

Secondly, several days ago the Provincial Treasurer, in fact on January 27, put forward a budget update, put forward with complete openness the situation of where the fiscal realities are in the province of Alberta today, and pointed out that we're not following this process of the past where special warrants were raised in cabinet “behind closed doors,” and then months would go by and these special warrants would then come before the Assembly and the Assembly would be asked after the fact to approve them. No, no, Mr. Speaker, that's not what happened. It's not what happened. The Provincial Treasurer has come forward with additional estimates, supplementary estimates, and it's part of, I think, the innovative reform that's going on in this Assembly, such as the innovative reform that came with the election of the Deputy Chairman of Committees, the innovative reform with respect to the tabling of these estimates and allowing all hon. members to have an opportunity to participate. It's an honour for all of us. It's an honour for all of us to serve as elected representatives of the people.

There's more than honour itself; there's also the responsibility we have to make sure that what we do say in this Assembly coincides completely with the truth, and there should not be a colouring of it in any way, shape, or form. I'm not suggesting for a moment that anybody who's participated today has really slid a great deal away, but I think there have been some liberties with the truth, and periodically one just should stand up. I know hon. members can be imaginative, but respective of all the imagination hon. members have, we still have to be consistent with our arguments.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's also been stated again and again and again that one of the items that is on the agenda of the government is that over the next several months it'll put together its new provincial budget to be in a position to table in this particular Legislative Assembly in the month of April 1993 a new provincial budget for the fiscal year beginning 1993-1994. We do need to have some time with that, and I sincerely hope that we will be able to rise out of the House within a matter of days from now and get on with the business of refining our plan. In the interim if there's any doubt being emanated by any opposition members, I would certainly invite all the public of Alberta to access *Hansard* and look at the updated documentation that was provided to this Assembly on January 27, 1993.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say one other thing with respect to appropriation budgeting. Premier Klein has made it very, very clear that we must do everything possible that we can with the fiscal arrangements of the province of Alberta to in fact cut wherever we can in a humane way. It's very important that the adjective clause “in a humane way” be added to the fact that there should be restraint and there should be reductions. So in recent weeks direction has been provided to all departments of the government of the province of Alberta, all agencies associated with the government that in fact very, very definitive attempts must be made by all of our senior managers and all of our managers throughout the whole public service to in fact find opportunities not to expend additional dollars. The people programs that we have are protected and are being reviewed from a policy point of view to see what improvements could be made. There are a lot of discretionary items with respect to furnishings and additional items that will be found to be canceled. It may make some people's environment a little less pleasant than it was before in terms of all the flowers, the trees, the paper, the pens, the machines, and that sort of thing. We are determined that the services to people will be maintained as best as we can do.

#### 11:50

When we arrive back here several months from now when the new provincial budget is tabled, I think Albertans will be rather impressed because we're building that budget in consort with a consultative process with the people. Early today in question period there were some statements made, in fact, that some people could not attend certain standing committee meetings, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important as well for everyone to recognize and understand that that consultative process in a very meaningful way is innovative as well and has never been tried before. That should be put in the proper perspective of the whole budget and the budget planning. The Premier has reduced the number of committees of caucus from 25, 26, 27 to four standing committees. There are savings accumulated with that. We've made information dollars available in the past, and we will continue to make additional information available as we continue to refine the process.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this Bill 56 is indeed worthy of support by all hon. members of this Legislative Assembly. I believe we are on a very exciting new track with respect to what the government has set forth for the people of Alberta. As well, I offer my congratulations to the opposition members who feel that they must get up and criticize everything the government does. I know that some of them are very imaginative in finding arguments, in fact, but some of them even have to really, really stretch to find an argument that they want to put into the record. Sometimes I know for a fact, because I've seen them wink to me, that they don't really believe what they say. Nevertheless, it's part of the process:

you sort of got to get up because the Whip has told you to get up today and lay it on the line for 30 minutes.

It's really kind of exciting to sit in the other parts of the House and hear the same speech 47 times now. I think maybe we'll ask the Select Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform to see whether or not it's possible for an hon. member to have a written speech tabled or filed in the Assembly so it wouldn't really require the hon. member to give the same speech again and again and again and to have a provision where the hon. member might simply stand up and say: "Sure. You know, on January 22, 1993, I gave this speech, tabled it. I want it in again." I think it would really, really be an innovative and important step that one could go forward with respect to that matter. That in fact might even have some further reductions that we may be able to accrue here in the Legislative Assembly.

Innovative, Mr. Speaker. That's the kind of thing the Provincial Treasurer is doing with Bill 56. I really believe that all hon. members would want to support this exciting new process brought forward by the Provincial Treasurer. I know that he will certainly have much more to say with respect to that. To be open is welcome, is fresh. To be alive is fresh. To ask the people to give us specific comments with respect to it is important, is dynamic.

One day I will really be shocked when I hear one of the hon. opposition members actually give up a speech, I know reluctantly. They'll spend a few seconds saying, "That's a good idea but . . ." Then it's the butts for 29 and a half minutes. If they could stand up for 30 minutes and say something nice about the process and say that this is good and this is innovative, in fact is quite a challenge - I know they're going to get up and say that, God, they couldn't think of anything more than 10 seconds long to say good about this government. But you know, they're really stretching it. I know they're stretching it, and I know if they really, really reach down into that cranium of theirs and that intelligence factor of theirs, they could put it all together. They may reluctantly say, "Yeah, they've really stretched" and the next week come back and say, "Well, we got it up to three minutes now, but there's no way we can get 30 minutes." If they really, really try and, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, go and talk to their constituents and ask what their constituents are saying about what this government has been doing in the last couple of months, really listen to their constituents and ask them, without giving their tainted views from their perspective, "What do you think about these changes that are going on; are you impressed with what the Premier is saying?" I think they'll find that more people than the number that they're willing to admit are saying, "We're encouraged."

Now, the trust factor that this government has to build is with the people, Mr. Speaker, and that's our commitment. We will do it, and we sincerely hope that we'll be successful in getting the appropriation Bill through. We would think it would be quite regrettable if the opposition were to vote against it, saying that this is not a good idea for the government to come forward in an open fashion to bring these supplementary estimates. You know, the more I think about that, I don't know what the opposition's going to do. The process is an open one; the process is a good one. These estimates have been brought here to the Assembly for total debate in a unique, new way. Can the opposition members vote against it? Can they vote against it and have any integrity with the arguments they have been giving in this Assembly in the last number of years?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to sort of share those thoughts.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to take my part in second reading debate on the interim supply Bill, Bill 56, of 1993 in the Legislative Assembly introduced by the Provincial Treasurer. Actually, I do want to take up the challenge issued by the Government House Leader: think of something nice to say about this government. Probably the nicest thing you can say about this government is that it's not the Getty government. I suspect rather strongly that they're going to try to trade on that right through an election campaign. "Look at us, folks. We're new; we're different. Hey, we've got new faces, you know." This is the argument that's being put to us: new faces on the front bench. Well, not all new, and not all that new either, put there by the Premier.

I guess the government is discovering there's a reason why some of those faces were not in the front bench earlier, but it takes time to learn some of these things. New faces and being different from the previous Premier: that's not a heck of a lot. It's something, and certainly people are talking about it. They're saying: "Well, who is this new guy? What's he going to do? Maybe we should take a chance on him." That's what they're saying. I listen, and that's what they're saying. It's a race against time, Mr. Speaker. Will they find out what he's really like before the election, or will they find out after the election? The funny thing is they're saying exactly what the Liberals have been saying for the last few years: "Hey, we're not Don Getty. Take a chance on us." So you've got, you know, two of them making essentially the same argument. I think what people are looking for in the times to come is a real alternative. I think it's time that somebody gave it to them. In fact, I think in this debate on the appropriation Bill, in line with the request of the Deputy Premier to have some positive comments, we should have those, some positive comments about alternatives.

Now, I think it's a wonderful thing that the government has downsized the cabinet. I thought it was a wonderful thing when Ray Martin proposed it two years ago, and I still think it's a wonderful thing. I mean, that's a good idea. We have a government that listens to proposals from the opposition party, and that's a good thing too. But what's act 2? I guess that's what the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is trying to get at in his remarks. When's the other shoe going to drop? We've got all the happy-face things being done by the government, the easy things, the downsizing of the cabinet and the shuffling of deputies and staff at that level. That's a fairly easy thing to do, but the more difficult thing, the other shoe, is in terms of the 99.9 percent of the budget that they haven't touched yet. What are they saying about that, Mr. Speaker? They're saying not very much at all, and that's the point that was made in a fairly articulate fashion, I thought, by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. What he didn't say is that the Liberals aren't saying what they're going to do either. In the beginning, well, they thought they would bring in a sales tax in order to solve the problem. They realized, of course, that that was a very unpopular idea, so they've retreated to the idea of a referendum. Well, what we'll have instead is a referendum on a sales tax, but in case you're afraid of having a referendum on a sales tax, what we're going to have instead is brutal cuts ahead of time.

Now, as I read the Premier's response to the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, admittedly the one that he says he didn't read before he signed as policy, that's exactly the same plan that he's talking about, without the referendum. So I guess the difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives is one brings in brutal cuts followed by a referendum on a sales tax; the other brings in brutal cuts followed by the sales tax itself. That's not much of a choice; that's not much of an alternative.

[Mr. Main in the Chair]

12:00

What we need, Mr. Speaker, in this province is a real alternative, and I suggest that there is one group in this Assembly that's prepared to offer one. In the last three months the leader of the New Democratic Party has released publicly not one, not two, not three, not four but five detailed policy papers dealing with the wide variety of issues that face our province today. Not a consultative process. That's something we did in the last few years, just as this government should have done in the last few years. You know, here we are: a government on its deathbed, at the very end of its mandate, and now all of a sudden they want to talk to the public. I mean, what have you been doing for the last 20 years?

The Deputy Premier, he's a sly – I was going to say a sly fox, but I don't mean to insult the member for Edmonton-Vegreville, so I will withdraw that term. I don't mean to say that. [interjections] What did I say? Edmonton-Vegreville? Vegreville.

He's a sly devil. He talks about new faces. I know how long he's been around here, Mr. Speaker. I looked at his briefcase the other day; there were dinosaur droppings on it. That's how long he's been around this Legislative Assembly. Everybody here remembers Doc Horner; I'm sure the Member for Westlock-Barrhead remembers Doc Horner. [interjections] I'm sorry. With all these riding names that are floating around here in this debate about boundaries, I'm getting a little confused as to who represents what. I guess this is all going to have to be resolved in months to come.

The member probably remembers Doc Horner; that's how long he's been around here. He's learned a few things. He's learned how to blow smoke around an issue. He's done it very well here this afternoon, and I congratulate him about that. But smoke is not what people want in Alberta today. They want a real alternative. They want a party that's prepared to put a jobs program forward in detail, that's prepared to talk about what has to be done with the budget, not an IOU that we're going to reveal some portions of our plans about the budget maybe before the election, maybe after, but certainly not a budget. That's what we're hearing today. This is all we're getting in terms of the legislative process before the election. Mark my words: this is it, and that's why it's so important that we be debating it today.

The leader of the New Democrats did bring forward a detailed budget paper with many sound and sensible proposals on how to deal with budget issues. A health care policy. You know, we have what I thought was a beginning of a rationalization of our health care system brought in by the former Minister of Health in the regionalization of hospital services: out the window, back to square one. That's not a policy on health care reform. That's an IOU that maybe in the future we'll develop something down the road.

There was a detailed position paper on education and training, a key issue of our time. Everybody knows the economy is changing, that people are going to be expected to change jobs and careers more and more often in the future. Where's the government? Where's the Liberal Party in terms of their detailed proposals on education and training? The New Democrats were there, and they presented it.

Also in the area – and this is an area that's of growing importance in urban areas and I suspect in rural areas as well – is the problem of crime and corrections: crime in the community, the incidence of break and enter, and sometimes violent crime. Now, these are the kinds of issues that people are talking about.

So yes, they are saying: "There's a new government here. There are new faces in the cabinet, and they can have a chance." But they're also saying: "Well, what are they going to do? How do I know that the sweetness and the light and the niceness that I see today is going to last after the election?" That's the question that's being asked, and it's a question that's not being answered by a Bill such as Bill 56.

Bill 56 cleans up some loose ends from the previous administration. Essentially that's all that it does. It continues the process, for example, of funding fire fighting costs by special warrant. Now, why has the government never realized that it should bring forward a budget which includes the fact that we do have fire fighters in Alberta and we do have to fight those fires? Why does the government fail to do that? Well, I guess because the numbers look better on budget day. This Bill continues that same old practice. It implements a number of other spending initiatives which were essentially leftover business from the previous administration. So I find that the concern that the government hasn't given any kind of a budget plan or direction is a valid one.

There are a lot of people who are waiting for announcements. Now, I suppose announcements for this year will be one thing, but it will be quite another thing to put that in the context of a budget plan: how we pay for those grant announcements, where the money comes from. Does it go on the deficit? Does it go on our tax bills? That question is never answered. Instead, you have these kinds of zoo committee meetings where people scramble to try and find what goes on: there aren't enough chairs and there are people in the hallway and there's hubbub and there's chaos. That's new and different. So when the Deputy Premier suggests that new faces on the front bench are a good thing, he may be right in that. But, in the end, people are going to have to judge what's behind the faces. The fact that they're new only takes you so far. I hope the race against time will be won by the government coming forward with some details in terms of how it intends to run the finances of the province, how it intends to deal with the changes in the labour force. Basically the direction they're headed is to dump more people into the unemployment column, and that's not going to be very healthy in terms of our economic future. I don't think anybody feels that that's a healthy development. Nonetheless, that's the kind of announcements that we get.

The Minister of Environmental Protection, who it's my responsibility to try to guide through this process, said almost nothing in his introductory comments about how he intends to deal with his new responsibility for environmental protection. Those are critically important words, Mr. Speaker, because we have new legislation passed by this Assembly during the current sitting, albeit last year, called the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act: regulations in draft form, no ideas in public about how those important responsibilities are going to be carried out or when that legislation is to be proclaimed and the regulations along with it. All that we have is this kind of vague promise. Well, it's new faces; it's a new government. New faces, new government: not good enough.

I would suggest that if you took a trip across the mountains, as some people do, and spent a little time in British Columbia, you might reminisce with some of them about a fellow named Bill Vander Zalm who was elected under almost identical circumstances as our current Premier: a government fading badly in the polls. The Premier of the day, the hon. Bill Bennett, stepped aside, and along came Mr. Vander Zalm, presented a new face, a fresh start, and won an election victory on the basis of little more than a smile and a promise. Well, it took a few years, but I think people in that province discovered that a new face, a smile, and a promise is a little shy of what we need to deal with the problems

in our troubled times. I suspect that Albertans will come to realize that this evident newness has to be measured alongside something, alongside some kind of performance. This Bill really does not reflect any kind of performance.

So I've done my best to say what I could that's good about this government. I'm afraid I've run out of good things to say, so I think I'll conclude my remarks.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was surprised that my hon. friend would sit down when he'd run out of things to say. That hasn't stopped him before. That's the only shot I will take at the opposition. He took many shots at us while he was speaking, but I've always gone on the advice that I'd rather go after the organ grinder than the monkey any day. Consequently, I will focus my shots on the Member for Barrhead and the people on the other side.

First of all, the Member for Barrhead or Deputy Premier announced that there were all kinds of new things happening for the government. Well, from long acquaintance with the Member for Barrhead I know he's the type of person that if they put vinyl seat covers on a Model T would think we had progress. Nevertheless, we got the vinyl covers on the old car over there, and I haven't seen that much difference.

**12:10**

They have knocked the cabinet down – what was it? – reduced it seven cabinet ministers. Then they turned around, and we got four chairmen of committees and three secretariats, whatever they are. Of course, for us peasants over here, how we can tell a cabinet minister from anybody else on the other side of the House is that they get a free car and they get bigger office space and they get more money. Well, these secretariats and these committee chairmen got a car, more office space, and more money. So as far as we're concerned, they're cabinet ministers. Abracadabra: they're not cabinet ministers; they're something else. A change in the title doesn't change anything. As a matter of fact, we put some researchers to work the other day to find out if there's one Tory that hasn't had an extra appointment with some money added to it, and we haven't found one yet. I'll be the very first, of course, to retract if he can find me one Tory – just like Sodom and Gomorrah, Mr. Speaker – that isn't living off the public purse over and above an MLA's salary. I might even turn into a pillar of salt like Lot promised to do. [interjections] I might have one: Diogenes with the lamb.

**Point of Order  
Improper Inferences**

MR. MUSGROVE: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have the Member for Bow Valley on a point of order.

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Speaker, I am one of the secretariats he's talking about. I do not get more money and I don't get a new car, on this issue.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, he was not listening closely enough. I didn't say every one got a new car. I'm saying that if they get a new car or more money or a newly designed office space better than the others, they are cabinet ministers. That's the only way we peons can tell them apart. Now, if the hon. member is willing to say he does not get more cheques or more money from the

Alberta government than any of the back-bench MLAs here, I will be willing to listen.

**Debate Continued**

MR. TAYLOR: Then, of course, the Member for Barrhead said that we never agree with anything. Well, he should remember. We've cheered and stamped and applauded until the skies could hear when the government apologized for releasing secret information in social services the other day. We applauded and slammed the desks with great abandon and thankfulness when the Member for Barrhead himself announced last year that he no longer would take applications for jobs for a private company. We love that. We cheer them on, and we cheered to the skies when they announced the by-election in Calgary-*Buffalo*. We thought that was the greatest thing they did. And of course the election in *Three Hills*: we welcomed it; we sent posies over to them. For the hon. member to say that the opposition has never thanked him and that the opposition has never appreciated his efforts is completely wrong.

We will applaud even more when they screw up the courage – Mr. Speaker, I would say “guts,” but I think it's already been taken out of the permissible language – to have another general election. We will applaud them again. So that is something they can look forward to. We will slap the desks with great glee as we march off to war another time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say a couple of things on general support. For instance, I notice \$5.8 million for Farm Income Support in this budget. One of the things that bothers me about this government – and it bothers many farmers – is that if they are eligible for a GRIP payment or for crop insurance particularly, the cheques are late. No problem; the government is just finding its way around. “After all, we're downsizing or changing around,” they say. But many of the farmers' premiums for crop insurance have been carried forward from the year previous or from previous times, and they're charged interest. The clock that runs that charges the farmers interest never stops, but the clock that delivers the farmers' cheques on crop insurance payments, payments where the farmer has co-operated with the government, somehow or another stops. So when a cabinet minister comes in here and asks for further income support, I think one of the things that I'd like to see gotten across to him is that the farmers themselves are fed up with being charged interest for any back payments they have, but when the government is late with their money, no, there's no interest paid whatsoever.

While we're on that, of course, Mr. Speaker, we also have a case of many farmers that are getting crop insurance payments that they should be paying against their mortgages, and ADC is short-circuited now by ADC to go over to pay for premiums. This is what happens when you have two departments of government, one that's covering insurance and one that's covering lending, being one and the same. They're grabbing the money before it goes through to its rightful place in the debt structure.

I'd also like to discuss the financial assistance to schools. Most of the poor boards in this province – and this province has had 22 years to change the policy of making rich MDs have a better class of education than the poor. If there's one thing that rings true today, and it doesn't matter whether you're a Liberal or a Conservative or an ND, it should be that the quality of education for a child should not depend upon the wealth of the community or the MD in which they live. Yet for 22 years we perpetuated a system – and it's become worse under this government than any other – where the wealth of a district will affect the quality of education more than any other thing that's out there bothering them.

The fact is that this government has had a chance to move to see that every child has an equal chance at education in this province, and instead of moving towards it, they're moving away. That's why the hon. Member for Barrhead, who picked up his books and his tail and scuttled out of sight, doesn't want to sit here and listen to the listing of the sins of 22 years. That's one thing that this government will be forever indicted for, because in spite of being one of the wealthiest societies known to man at one time, since the time of the pharaohs probably or since ancient Spain when they had the whole world's riches at their feet in the old pirate days, this government did nothing about equalizing opportunity and costs of educating children. It's a shame that will hang around their neck like an albatross for many, many years to come, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at the other area that I wanted to touch on for a moment – it's something I'm fairly familiar with as an earth scientist of some years – you have another half a million dollars in there for Intergovernmental Co-ordination and Research. That is something that has to be looked at very, very closely, Mr. Speaker: half a million dollars of taxpayers' money that's going into research. Everybody says how lovely research is, but when you analyze who is getting the research, who gets the benefits from the research, it nearly always goes to a major international company, usually foreign-owned but not necessarily so. They've always been very good at talking to governments. After a couple of free jet rides down to Ottawa and back and forth and telling them how lovely they are, they fall for the old siren song that if they give donations to the corporations and work co-operatively with them on research, somehow or another it's going to bring great benefits to society. That's never happened, Mr. Speaker. In general, what has happened is that the taxpayer has ended up funding research that turns out a product that he then pays for a second time through higher prices because the research was taken by a corporation and used to protect a patent so no competition would go ahead.

In conclusion, I want to give one more point, I would suppose, that the Deputy Premier seemed to be alarmed that oppositions were in opposition. Well, that's a rather peculiar thing. That's like finding out that a bear has fur. When the Greeks invented this system in which those people over on the other side and you, Mr. Speaker, and all of us were lucky enough to get elected, it was a system electing not a government. They elected a party that governs and a party that opposes: a party that proposes; a party that opposes. Collectively we dispose; collectively we do the whole thing. The idea that it soon happens – and it's unfortunate, and this occurs with the Liberals too. If we were in for 22 years, we'd be as arrogant and as insufferable and as blind as you people are, I am sure, nearly as bad anyhow. And even the NDP, God bless their little pointed heads: their halo would slip down, and it would choke them, and they would become the same way too. The point is that once you're elected too long, you forget that you're appointed and think that you're anointed.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your recognition of the true name of the constituency that I'm proud to represent. It was referred to as Edmonton-Vegreville earlier today.

AN HON. MEMBER: Order.

MR. FOX: Order?

AN HON. MEMBER: Speak to the Bill.

12:20

MR. FOX: All right, I'll speak to the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to get involved in the debate on Bill 56 as well, because there are many things included in this Bill that we didn't have a chance to cover in the kind of depth that they deserve during the estimates consideration. We do have an opportunity provided to us today in second reading and next week in committee and third reading to address some of the things in the Bill. I want to get to the meat of the issue and talk about things that concern me as the Agriculture and Rural Development spokesperson for the Official Opposition. Unfortunately, today is not one of the those days when I can rise to the challenge offered by the hon. Deputy Premier and speak positively about the government. Now, I often do. Members know that when credit is due, the Member for Vegreville is on his feet to give credit. When advice is needed, the hon. member for Vegreville is prepared to do that, and yes, on those occasions when criticism is required, the hon. members opposite had better be prepared to listen to it.

With respect to the supplementary estimates as proposed for Agriculture and Rural Development, I fear that I have to level some harsh criticisms of the government in that regard, because many of the . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Really.

MR. FOX: I know that's a surprise to some hon. members. I know it's out of character, but on behalf of the people I represent, I feel obliged to make some remarks on the record about these proposed expenditures under the department of agriculture, because many of them, Mr. Speaker, deal with the government's so-called reaction to the very serious drought problems in northeastern Alberta that we've experienced not only last year or the year before but over a number of years.

Mr. Speaker, it's been very, very frustrating for me as a representative in northeastern Alberta that I have not been able to convince the minister of agriculture or his colleagues that there is indeed a drought in northeastern Alberta and that because there's drought, there are problems in the agricultural community, the small towns and villages, and that government needs to come up with a comprehensive plan of action to address the many problems caused by the drought. Now, I don't know why I haven't been able to convince them. Maybe it's because the minister of agriculture doesn't have any influence in cabinet and wasn't able to convince cabinet colleagues to provide enough funding to deal with the problems caused by the drought. How can I say? I don't know what goes on in that cabinet room. Maybe it's the fact that the Conservative MLAs from northeastern Alberta don't have sufficient influence in their caucus to compel the government to come forward with reasonable, measured solutions to the drought problems that we experience in northeastern Alberta. I can't speculate. Again that would be out of character for me to do that, so I won't.

What we have to deal with are the facts. The fact is that this problem has been ignored to the peril of the government on the one hand, but much more seriously than that to the detriment of the many fine people and families who are involved in agriculture in northeastern Alberta and the communities that they support. This isn't a recent phenomenon; this is a long-term problem. When the minister of agriculture stood in his place last year and talked about how this, in his assessment, one year – or more correctly put, he said: half a year of drought does not a disaster

make. Well, it's not half a year of drought. It's not even a year of drought. It's several prolonged years of drought in the northeastern part of Alberta: Vegreville, Hairy Hill, Two Hills, into Elk Point, St. Paul, up to Bonnyville. It even touched in the Smoky Lake region to the northwest and to Vermilion in the southeast. This year it was widespread, but there is a core area there that's been very dry for a number of years, Mr. Speaker, and I know because I represent the area. I live smack-dab in the middle of it. In fact, to illustrate for hon. members just how dry it is in that area, there's a lake a mile and a half north of my farm. It's called Watts Lake. [interjection] You might say, "What lake?" because there is no lake now, hon. Member for Red Deer-North. It was four miles long and half a mile wide, and it's dried up. It's gonzo, Alonzo. There's no lake there anymore, and people are saying, "What lake?"

It's an ominous kind of a feeling. Two years ago the dugouts were empty, the sloughs were drying up, but now the lakes are disappearing. It's a very ominous feeling for people who live and farm in the area, because they don't know how they're going to manage to raise their livestock. They don't know how they're going to manage to maintain domestic water supply or cope with a number of problems. How are they going to raise crops in an area where it doesn't seem to want to rain anymore, Mr. Speaker? So it's a very serious problem, and it's existed over a number of years.

Just to refute the hon. minister of agriculture's claim that it's sort of a short-term thing, that it hasn't really been very dry for very long, I would remind him that in 1988 the government of the province of Alberta came forward with a number of programs to help address the drought generally in the province but more specifically in northeastern Alberta. So they acknowledged in 1988 that this was a serious problem that needed to be responded to and they did, with a number of programs, most of which were advocated by the New Democrat Official Opposition: more positive ideas coming from us to them that ended up being described in programs with money allocated for such things as well drilling, water transmission, dugout construction, a program that involved the community pastures to try and provide alternate water sources. The former minister of forestry was very involved in that.

So the government did come out with a range of programs to help deal with the drought in northeastern Alberta in 1988, and for the minister of agriculture to stand in his place in 1992 and pull his Alfred E. Neuman act – What, me worry? No drought. It's only been dry for half a year – just doesn't stand up to the test of time. It just doesn't reflect what's really happening there. What's equally distressing about the fact that the government has ignored the problem is that the minister of agriculture himself is an MLA who represents a constituency in northeastern Alberta, the MLA for Bonnyville and also the MLA from Bonnyville because he lives in the area. He drives through that area; he should be in a position to know that it's dry there. I shouldn't have to tell him that it's dry. His constituents certainly do a good enough job of it, but still there has not been much forthcoming in the way of meaningful new programs to cope with the drought.

Now, in terms of the opposition role, my colleague the hon. gentleman from Westlock-Sturgeon described in sort of a traditional sense how Parliament is supposed to work. One party governs; the other party opposes. He didn't tell us what the other party did. Anyway, we'll deal with that another day. Part of the opposition's role is naturally to oppose the government so that people know that both sides of issues are being raised and considered in an open and public way. But I've never been satisfied, nor have my colleagues in the Official Opposition New

Democrat caucus, with merely opposing. It's been the trademark of our leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood: he insists the opposition play a very positive advocacy role. We're not going to be worth our salt or our pillar of salt if we don't advocate, if we don't have positive plans of action, if we don't put forward our own agenda to deal with things.

So not content to merely criticize the government, I and my New Democrat colleagues came up with a number of positive, plausible, doable, workable, simple solutions to the drought in northeastern Alberta. In fact, I joined with a number of duly nominated candidates in northeastern Alberta to come up with a strategy. We proposed a four-point plan to deal with the drought, sent a letter to the minister of agriculture, and it's been ignored. Mr. Speaker, we advocated that they reinstate the well drilling and dugout construction programs to help cope with the drought in 1992. What did they do? Well, they topped up some money. They added some money that appears in Bill 56 here, some of the money that was provided in the Field Services element, to provide grants to producers to reduce the cost of constructing water wells, dugouts or stock watering dams, thereby ensuring a long-term supply of water for livestock and domestic use.

Well, that sounds great. But the fact is, the money they put into that program was for projects approved prior to and up until March 31, 1992. That deals with the drought problem experienced by domestic water users, people who need water wells and dugouts for their livestock, for the drought in 1991. It doesn't do anything to cope with the drought that ensued in the months that followed. The drought of 1992 remains unaddressed by this program, indeed by this Bill, because it just didn't deal with it at all, and I think that's a real shame. That was our first suggestion.

The second suggestion we made was that the minister and his staff do a complete inventory of the feed supply in northeastern Alberta to determine whether or not there was sufficient feed in the region to overwinter the livestock in the area, to overwinter the cattle herds and take care of the other animals in the area without requiring a massive influx of feed from other regions. That inventory being done, then the government would be in a position to decide whether or not it made sense to try and come up with a program to bring feed in from other regions or just move it around from here to here. The government can't make it rain, Mr. Speaker. According to section 92 of the Constitution Act that's a federal responsibility. But the province can come up with programs that help cope with a lack of moisture, and they've failed miserably in that regard. So we suggested they do this inventory of the feed in northeastern Alberta and let people know what the results of that inventory were and then come up with a plan of action. Well, again they didn't do it, ignored the request. Another thing that we urged them to do – and I'm just off the top of my head trying to remember all of these. There are so many wonderful ideas we've brought forward to them that they've ignored. I'm just trying to recall them.

#### 12:30

One of them was to make sure that the crop insurance corporation took the premium payments that producers owe them out of the final payments producers receive from the crop insurance corporation or the interim payments due them under GRIP. Let's examine why we would make such a proposal. Well, Mr. Speaker, cash flow is a real problem on the farm, especially in these times when crops are poor, expenses are high, markets are a little bit shaky. So cash flow is a real problem. You're a farmer out there producing; your crop's been wiped out; you're hoping to get some relief either through GRIP or crop insurance. You've joined the programs, but you owe some money on your premiums. What do

you find when you start delivering grain, whatever you have, in the fall? That your cheque isn't money that you can use to go and pay the fuel dealer, the fertilizer dealer, the chemical dealer, pay your taxes to the municipality or to the provincial government, if you ever manage to make enough money to pay taxes on income as a farmer. No, that money is almost garnished off your cheque, in a sense, to pay for the premiums for these programs of assistance that you've applied for, and it makes it very difficult for farmers to generate the cash flow they need to keep up with their obligations. It's a real problem, because on a lot of these overdue accounts there are very high rates of interest charged per month. It's been anywhere from 1 and a half to 2 percent per month on some of these trade accounts. So farmers want that money to go out and pay their bills, live up to their obligations, and yet the government insists through their regulations that the money be used to pay, in the first instance, the premiums for GRIP and crop insurance.

So it would have been a simple thing for the government to just say: "All right; we still want that money. You owe us the money for those premiums, and rather than take them out of your initial payments and entitlements, we're going to take them out of the interim payments from GRIP that are due sometime in March of the following calendar year or take them out of the final payment that you receive from crop insurance, if indeed an interim payment was made prior to that." It would have really improved the cash flow. It would have been a simple kind of adjustment to make. Ignored by the government.

Then we suggested that come October 1, the government not charge interest on these unpaid premiums. I mean, the government has the prerogative to do that. The Bill that guides the crop insurance corporation gives the corporation the latitude to charge interest on such a date as fixed by the corporation at such a rate that they choose. Last year it was November 1, 1991. November 1 was the day after which interest started to accumulate on unpaid crop insurance premiums. What did they do in 1992, when times were tougher, crops were worse, with widespread crop harvest problems and yield problems across the province? What did they do? They moved the interest rate date forward, so that farmers who had no income, no crops to sell, often no crops harvested, had to start paying interest to the government at the rate of 1 and one quarter percent per month after October 1. Well, is that fair, Mr. Speaker?

MS BARRETT: No.

MR. FOX: I don't think so either. Thank you, hon. member. I don't think that's fair at all.

MR. GOGO: Anybody else?

MR. FOX: So it's a real problem, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's one that the government should have addressed in response to . . .

I can't get anything past the Member for Lethbridge-West, Mr. Speaker. I don't know. He's a sharp cookie, and I've always felt that way. One sharp cookie.

Mr. Speaker, they could have made that simple change in the mandate of the crop insurance corporation so that they took the premium payments out of payments that farmers would receive later on in the year to give them some cash flow and stop that interest rate clock from ticking on October 1, to at least give farmers a chance to generate some income so they can pay their bills before their very own government starts to ding them at the rate of 1 and one-quarter percent per month. Did they do that? No, they didn't.

Another thing, another very positive idea that the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon alluded to that was pioneered by the New Democrat Official Opposition, in fact by way of a Bill introduced in the House yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Hail and Crop Insurance Amendment Act, is to start paying farmers interest. Now, this is a radical suggestion, hon. members opposite, so hang on to your seats. This is a very radical suggestion, but we believe that the crop insurance corporation should be required by law to pay farmers interest on the unpaid balance of claims owing at the same rate and after the same date that the government instructs the crop insurance corporation to charge farmers interest on unpaid premiums. Now, does that seem fair to you? It seems fair to me. If the government's going to tell them you'd better charge interest, well, the government should tell them you'd better pay it as well.

MS BARRETT: It seems fair to me.

MR. FOX: I agree, but again no response from the government. It would be so simple, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that the men and women who work for the crop insurance corporation, unlike this government, are working very hard to try and help the people they serve. They've got dozens of adjusters traveling the province trying to cope with the thousands of claims, record numbers of claims from one end of the province to the other: delayed harvest, delayed claims. It's caused a lot of problems, and I talked to a farmer yesterday who said he hadn't received his cheque to this date from the crop insurance corporation for his claim that was submitted sometime in September. He still hadn't received the money. Now, it's a problem, but it's not the farmers' fault. Maybe it's not the fault of the crop insurance corporation either, but the farmer should not have to bear the burden of those delays. If you're going to charge them interest on the money that they owe you for premiums, then you guys had better be prepared to pay them interest on the money that you still owe them on unpaid claims.

Another good idea that New Democrats brought forward in an effort to convince the government that there are ways that we can cope with the drought in northeastern Alberta was to establish a feed bank in northeastern Alberta that would work in the following manner. We would have people in the province of Alberta who have surplus feed contribute feed to the feed bank. Now, where would that come from? Well, it could come from central Alberta, where maybe people had good crops and they've got excess straw. They don't need it, and if they understand that their fellow farmers in northeastern Alberta are suffering and need some straw, they would donate it to the feed bank. Or you may have people in southern Alberta who had bountiful crops, beautiful crops that were tragically wiped out by premature frost and a disastrous snowstorm in southern Alberta that flattened those beautiful crops and in many cases maybe rendered them unharvestable. Well, you know, it seemed to me that those farmers could donate that greenfeed, if possible, to the feed bank as long as the crop insurance corporation was willing to write that crop off quickly and at the hundred percent level. The quid pro quo there would mean that the farmer in exchange for the rapid adjustment would donate that greenfeed to the feed bank, the surplus feed, and it could be shared. It's a co-operative kind of thing.

I know that's not unparliamentary, but it's an uncommon word in Tory circles. It's not one that causes them to salivate, like "privatization" and "deregulation" and "globalization" and "competitiveness." It's a different kind of word; it's called "co-operation."

Anyway, you get farmers from different parts of the province willing to donate to the feed bank so that their friends and cousins

and fellow farmers can benefit from it in northeastern Alberta. It doesn't cost a lot of money to do that; it just takes a little logistics to do that, Mr. Speaker. What would have been required from the government is an agreement to institute a sort of feed freight assistance program that would pay for the cost of transporting the feed from one region of the province to another. The rancher in the minister of agriculture's constituency who's been ignored by the government, who needs straw or greenfeed or hay – hay could be contributed or even grain – would be in a position to access that for whatever cost, if there's a cost involved, or free if it's donated, but the government should be willing to pay the freight from one region to the other. The farmer from Bonnyville could go down to south of Calgary, if a farmer was willing to donate some straw, and bale it himself. The baling would be his expense because he'd have to bale it if he had it at home anyway, but the transportation was the thing we were looking for. It would be a pittance; it would be less than the amount of money that the Conservative government has spent to give extra jobs and extra income to all of the Klein supporters emerging from the election campaign, again as eloquently stated by the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon. That would have facilitated the program and made it work: another good idea ignored by the government.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, it is a serious problem, and it's not just one that members of the New Democrat Official Opposition talk about on frequent occasions. Indeed, there have been many meetings in northeastern Alberta: reeves, local municipalities, councillors, farm groups, the Northeast/North-central Drought Committee from Smoky Lake, for example. There have been meetings in Two Hills with advocates from the county, including their municipal councillors, meeting with government, meeting with the crop insurance corporation, trying to get them to come up with some reasonable way of coping with the drought in northeastern Alberta. They just get delayed and delayed and stonewalled by the minister of agriculture at best. At worst, they get an outright denial from him that there are any problems there, and it's serious. [interjection]

12:40

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order? Is the hon. Member for Dunvegan rising on a point of order?

MR. CLEGG: Not specifically on a point of order. I just wondered if the hon. Member for Vegreville would entertain a question.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, it's up to the hon. Member for Vegreville.

MR. FOX: The hon. Member for Dunvegan will have ample opportunity if he survives the next election to ask me questions when I'm minister of agriculture, but because we will be an open and honest government like we are an open and honest opposition, I'd gladly entertain a question from the hon. member.

MR. CLEGG: Well, I want to ask the minister – not the minister; sorry about that – the hon. Member for Vegreville if he could tell me which was the driest area in the province of Alberta in 1991 and 1992.

MR. FOX: What is this? A geography quiz? I'll answer the question this way, Mr. Speaker, just by pointing out to the hon.

member that northeastern Alberta is not the only region in the province that is dry. Indeed, there is a significant portion of the province of Alberta in the Mighty Peace region in the Dunvegan constituency that has been very dry as well. I'd like to acknowledge that, if he wants to join with me and my colleagues in lobbying the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to try and come up with some reasonable response.

I was up in his constituency, in Rycroft in fact, and laid out a program of action for those farmers there to lobby the government to get assistance when their crops were snowed under and they'd had excessive rain. The government came forward with the disaster assistance program. I'm glad they did, and I hope the hon. member will join me in lobbying for a program for the farmers of northeastern Alberta.

Any other questions here, Mr. Speaker? Put up your hand.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please.

AN HON. MEMBER: You didn't answer it.

MR. FOX: Didn't answer it? If the hon. member would only do his research, Mr. Speaker, the people of the province of Alberta . . .

MS BARRETT: I have a question.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a question for the member. I would like to know the policies he's recommending to prevent soil erosion, particularly with respect to windbreak tree planting, if he has an answer to that.

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, I have a very exciting proposal that I would like to announce to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands and indeed all members of the Assembly.

MS BARRETT: Hurry. We don't have a lot of time. I'd like to know it.

MR. FOX: We'd call it a triple W program, a program that would deal with the need for windbreaks, wildlife habitat, and wetlands. The hon. member raises a great concern for farmers across the province, and that is the need to conserve our precious resource, the soil of the province of Alberta. It is very important to people living in the cities in Alberta because they after all eat the food that we produce, enjoy the bounties of nature, and want to see that protected.

This government has failed in that regard, too, to come forward with a wide range of programs to encourage people to use the trees that are so capably grown in the Redwater-Andrew constituency there: to plant them, to develop windbreaks and shelterbelts, to encourage farmers by way of perhaps a tax credit. Let's call it conservation credits. We could use our tax system to provide . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair regrets to interrupt the hon. member, but in accordance with Standing Order 61(3) the Chair is required to put the question to the Assembly on all appropriation Bills on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 56 read a second time]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the order of government business on Monday will be committee study of Bill 56 in the afternoon and conclusion of second reading on Bill 55 in the evening.

Have a nice weekend.

[At 12:46 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 2:30 p.m.]

