

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 27, 1993**

2:30 p.m.

Date: 93/04/27

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table with the House four copies of correspondence addressed to the Premier from a constituent of mine that clearly demonstrates that as a former public employee her deferred pension was affected retroactively by a change in regulation brought forward by the Provincial Treasurer in 1991.

MR. SPEAKER: Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Leg. Offices I would like to table and have the honour to present the 1991-92 annual report of the Auditor General, which is submitted pursuant to section 19(4) of the Auditor General Act. Copies have already been distributed to the members.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the annual report for Athabasca University for the year ended March 31, 1992.

I'd also like to table the annual report of Keyano College for the year 1991-92 and the 1991-92 annual report of Red Deer College.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 44 of the Conflicts of Interest Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly the first annual report of the office of the Ethics Commissioner for the period April 1, '92, to March 31, 1993.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the Minister of Labour.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly two leaders in one of the fastest growing communities in Alberta: the town of Sylvan Lake. Today we have with us the mayor of Sylvan Lake, Ted Iverson, and one of the councillors Ted Parks. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to meet with a group of injured workers today outside the Legislature. Some of them are

in the gallery joined by two of the organizers of their event today: Mr. Terry Spencer and Mr. David Neary. I would ask if they would stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to introduce through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly some 32 grade 8 and grade 9 students from the Red Deer Christian school. They are accompanied by teachers Michele Darnell and John Kranenborg as well as parents and helpers Art Berry, Barbara Quaife, Kathy Mullin, Joann Montgomery, and Barbara Sheppard. In greeting these good folks a little earlier today, I had advised them that the Premier was going to be out of the province, that he was on an important trip to California. Mr. Premier, they appreciate that you postponed your trip so that you could join with us in greeting them here this afternoon. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm reception of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you four students who are accompanied by their teacher. These students are from the Kotchi-Tan-Mena school in Slave Lake. Kotchi-tan-mena means let's try again, and these are adult students who are trying again. I'd like to ask them to stand as I read their names: Mary Yellowknee, Tina L'Hirondelle, Hilda Belanger, Sharon Desjarlais, and their teacher June Fleming. I'd ask the House to give them a warm welcome, please.

head: **Oral Question Period**

Freedom of Information Legislation

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the Legislative Assembly the government tabled a discussion paper on freedom of information. Now, this is interesting that we are getting a discussion paper. We in the New Democrats in this Legislature have been advocating freedom of information since 1977 with private member's Bills. More importantly, this government promised us freedom of information legislation in its throne speech, and I quote from the throne speech:

My government is determined to respond to changing needs.

New access to information legislation will be introduced to ensure my government's policy of full disclosure of information is protected in law.

Well, then in the leadership campaign we had the Premier promising freedom of information before the next election. So my question to the under-new-management Premier is simply this: why did the Premier break his promise and break the promise of the government in the Speech from the Throne and introduce a discussion paper rather than a Bill?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know. What is this?

MR. KOWALSKI: It's a Bill.

MR. KLEIN: Right; it's a Bill. That's Bill 61. It was introduced, and it was given first reading. It was given first reading as Bill 61. We also said and I said during the leadership campaign that I would seek a wide variety of public input to make sure the Bill is a good Bill, just as the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act through public input and public consultation is a good Bill.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's misleading the Assembly, and the Premier knows it. This says: a discussion guide. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Perhaps a retraction or a different way of phrasing it, hon. member.

MR. MARTIN: Well, he's sort of distorting the truth here in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. He passed out this discussion guide. I remind him that in the Speech from the Throne when he was part of the government, it said that it will be "protected in law." That does not mean introducing a Bill and then having a discussion about it after. That's the reality. I ask the Premier again: why is he changing his word? Why is the government changing their word? We should have a law here by now instead of a discussion paper.

MR. KLEIN: Well, really I can't understand the hon. leader of the ND opposition's objection to this particular format. If there is one party that demands public consultation, it's the New Democratic Party. Everything that they bring up, Mr. Speaker, they're saying: we have to have public input; we have to have public consensus. I mean, their good friends, the Association of Alberta Taxpayers and the civil liberties union, are all saying that they want public input, and what we're doing is acceding to their request.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, we brought in a private member's Bill in 1977. It seems to me that 18, 19 years is enough discussion. The government should have learned now what freedom of information is about and discussed it with people. I'd remind the Premier that in the Speech from the Throne over a year ago, they promised us this Bill. The discussion should be over. Isn't it true that the government is just stalling to try to get through an election without bringing this Bill in?

2:40

MR. KLEIN: No, it's not true, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, we introduced Bill 61 in the House. You know, if you want to create a good Bill, a good Act, a good piece of legislation, what you do is provide the public with your intent, then you take that legislation out to the public, much the same as we did with the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, and you bring into this Legislature a good piece of legislation. I would think that's what the opposition would like.

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

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to designate my second question to the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

Edmonton Oilers

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning we were all treated to a vintage Peter Pocklington performance. There was fear. There was recrimination. There were a whole bunch of bottom lines. At the end of it, all we really know is that Mr. Pocklington would like either to own Edmonton Northlands Coliseum for cheap or else have rent virtually free so that he can manage the facility and collect all of the revenue. Also this morning I received a fax from a city of Hamilton alderman who writes:

All the figures we see and you see bandied about in the media with regard to Hamilton offers of millions of dollars are totally fictitious. There is absolutely no deal, no understanding or wink-wink between Pocklington and the Hamilton City Council.

I'd like to file copies of that for the Assembly. I wonder if the Premier would indicate to the Assembly that the provincial government of Alberta, which is an investment partner in Northlands, will in no way use taxpayers' money to transfer Northlands' assets to one Peter Pocklington?

MR. KLEIN: I can say, Mr. Speaker, that we have no intentions of becoming financially involved with Peter Pocklington relative to the Oilers situation and his current proposal to move the team.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier should get up to speed here. You're involved with Peter Pocklington through the Treasury Branches, the Gainers corporation, and as an equity partner in Northlands.

Mr. Pocklington laughed at his news conference at the Treasurer's suggestion that the \$42 million line of credit would be pulled if he moved the team out. He said that he could raise that money in Hamilton in half a day, because he understands that to be about half the value of the team. In view of these developments, will the Premier advise the Assembly whether he is now prepared to seek an injunction preventing the movement of the Oilers team out of Alberta till all the debts are paid in Alberta, every last one of them?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are not an equity partner with the Oilers in any way, shape, or form. The Treasury Branch is a bank, and it has a business and financial arrangement with Mr. Pocklington. I'm sure that some of the members of the opposition are also depositors or perhaps creditors . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: We can't be. We're in the Legislature.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, really. With the Treasury Branch you can't? [interjections] Oh, you can't. [interjection] Well, maybe you were.

The fact is that we have no intention of getting involved in this particular deal other than to say that we're fully supportive as a government and as a part of this community of keeping the Oilers in Edmonton. They are – and I thought I would never say this, Mr. Speaker – a tremendous team.

MR. McINNIS: The Oilers will be a wonderful team once again.

What the Premier doesn't understand is that the province of Alberta is owed lots of money by Peter Pocklington, in excess of a hundred million dollars. All I'm asking is this: will he go to court now, seek an injunction to prevent the move until the hundred million dollars plus is paid? Yes or no?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no, we won't be applying for an injunction. This is a business arrangement between the Oilers and Northlands. There is in the minds of our government and I'm sure in the minds of the opposition a desire to keep the Oilers in the city of Edmonton for the good of Edmonton and for the good of Alberta. Indeed I'm sure that the Calgary Flames would not want to see the Oilers leave. It's probably the best and the most entertaining hockey in the NHL. I'll be writing to the governors encouraging them to give this matter very, very careful consideration and encouraging them to give full examination to the impact of this move on the province of Alberta. But, no, we are not

going to get involved in any way, shape, or form in the business arrangement between Peter Pocklington and Northlands.

Freedom of Information Legislation

(continued)

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, since 1989 and every year for four years the Liberal Party has submitted to this forum freedom of information legislation in a proposed Bill. The Conservative government has not only refused to allow those Bills to come forward for a vote, but members will recall that very arrogantly the then Premier two years ago said: Albertans don't need freedom of information legislation. This Act that has been submitted by the Premier is going to be delayed for one or two years. It's full of loopholes, and it's full of escape clauses. Last year the opposition roasted the government on NovAtel using leaked information and using information that we received from states in the United States that had freedom of information legislation. I'd like to ask the Premier why he would include a clause, section 56, that would call for a \$5,000 fine for an Albertan or an MLA who used leaked information.

MR. KLEIN: The clause is there to address the illegality of a situation, not legitimately leaked information like the Liberals would leak.

Mr. Speaker, the question that was raised by the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is precisely the kind of question we want to have addressed through the public consultation process. Certainly when we tabled the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, there were a number of deficiencies in that Act. It was not meant to be a pure Act. This is why we want to hear from the civil liberties union, from the taxpayers association, from municipalities, from the public at large as to what they think is right and what is wrong about this particular Act. The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is perfectly invited and allowed to have his input as well.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, in the same way that this Bill has escape clauses and loopholes, the Premier uses the consultation process as his escape clause. I simply ask for the rationale. I ask for an explanation. What's the rationale for section 56? Give us an answer, Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess, again, we can go into a hypothetical situation, but if it's the desire and the intent of the Liberal Party to give out personal information, information relative to an individual's health situation or information that could violate someone's civil rights, and if they think that is right, then I would ask them to put that argument forward.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Premier in a letter dated December of last year to answer 240 questions, questions that relate to NovAtel, questions that relate to Gainers, questions that relate to MagCan. The Premier has yet to answer that letter. I'd like to know, Mr. Premier, what's going to happen between now and a year and a half or two years when this Bill gets put into place. Are you still going to refuse to answer your letters?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I don't have enough time personally, physically, to answer 240 questions. Secondly, there is the question that the Liberal Party raised, and the hon. leader of the Liberal Party has not given me an answer to this particular question: if I provide him with the answers, will he use

it politically and therefore will he be using government resources to prepare his political platform?

MR. SPEAKER: Rocky Mountain House, followed by Edmonton-Highlands.

2:50 Violence against Women and Children

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know there has been a great increase in family violence, child abuse, and violence against women. On behalf of my constituents I have raised these issues with the Minister of Justice on a number of occasions. Today we see in the House of Commons that there's been a Bill tabled, Bill C-126. To the Minister of Justice: will this piece of legislation answer the questions that I have been raising with him?

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, not only has the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House been raising these matters with me but so have many other hon. members as well as many Albertans. I'm particularly pleased to be able to advise the House and Albertans today that Bill C-126 has in fact been tabled in the House of Commons for first reading. One of the reasons I'm so happy about it is the fact that rather than believing, as we sometimes do in Legislatures, that we must look at an overall Act before we start correcting any specifics in it, the Canadian government has said: we know there is a problem, and we are going to address that specific problem at this time. So Bill C-126 does amend the Criminal Code of Canada in a number of ways which will be extremely helpful in assisting the police on the beat and the police right across Canada, in our cities and in our rural areas, to protect women and children to a much greater degree than what is allowed under the current legislation or not taken under the current legislation because of its complexity.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Supplementary.

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm curious if the new piece of legislation will in fact increase the penalties. How is it going to in fact offer greater protection? I understand that currently in many cases there are court injunctions against individuals, and it doesn't seem to work. How is this going to improve that situation?

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, there are court injunctions that are given in civil courts, most often in divorce actions and that type of action. However, we're dealing with the Criminal Code now. As one specific example, stalking is going to be defined, that action by many male spouses that causes much fear in women and in children as well. I'll just paraphrase what stalking will include: persistently following someone, spending extended periods of time watching someone's home or place of work, making harassing telephone calls to someone and/or his or her friends, making contact with someone's neighbours or coworkers, and contacting and possibly threatening someone's companions or spouse. The amendment goes on to cover such things as bail conditions, conspiracy, parental child abduction, child abuse, cross-examination of children, and also exclusion of public at trials.

I commend the federal government for this move, and I hope this Bill moves quickly through three readings and Governor General approval.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Highlands, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

St. Michael's Hospital

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that last year the two hospitals operating in Lethbridge, those being the Lethbridge regional and St. Michael's hospitals, came to an agreement to not duplicate services. In other words, St. Michael's would look after long-term care patients, and Lethbridge regional would look after acute care patients. However, I've since discovered that there are now building plans for St. Michael's to expand to include 200 beds, of which a hundred will be acute care beds, 35 of those being surgical beds. They plan to build three operating rooms as well at a cost of a total of \$53 million. My question to the Health minister is this. Obviously there's a threat of duplication of services here, and I'd like to know if she recognizes that this is potentially a wasteful expenditure of taxpayers' dollars at a time that is critical in our health care system.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two hospitals in Lethbridge, the Lethbridge regional and St. Michael's, and there are two boards that govern those two hospitals. Those two boards are working very closely together to resolve issues in that city, and I'm very much working on the advice of those two boards.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the board of St. Michael's is appointed. The board of Lethbridge regional is elected, and that makes a big difference. Secondly, I need to point out that the issue was not resolved at a very important public forum last night. Finally, I'd like to let the minister know that the Lethbridge regional only has 271 beds open. It has closed six operating rooms, three of which are fully furnished, and it's also closed 30 beds which are ideal for surgery. I'd like to ask the minister: given the potential waste of taxpayers' dollars, is she willing or prepared to call in an independent investigatory team now to prevent the expenditure of unnecessary dollars in Lethbridge?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, philosophically I would say that the member and I would disagree on a couple of areas. One, I am very much a believer in community based decision-making. Whether those boards are elected or appointed, they are made up of people from the Lethbridge area, and I have a lot of confidence in those people to look after the best interests and the best expenditures of taxpayers' dollars. Certainly I am working with the boards with any assistance that I can offer them. I do believe that the community is the best decision-maker, and I'll work very closely with that community to resolve those issues in their community.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, perhaps as well I might be able to supplement the answer.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, briefly.

MR. KOWALSKI: Funding allocations and the construction allocations come under the office of the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. In the case of St. Michael's no decision to advance any construction has been given, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Driver Licensing

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the Insurance Bureau of Canada and the Alberta Motor Association have

endorsed extremely stringent conditions on new drivers. I understand that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is stickhandling this one, so I'll direct my question to him. What action is the minister prepared to take to deal with the alarming accident rate involving new drivers?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we're always concerned with the statistics as they relate to new drivers and our youth. We do have a probationary licence program in the province of Alberta that has been working fairly well. I read with interest the Insurance Bureau of Canada's backgrounder to a graduated licence proposal and will continue to go over it.

I do have some concerns, and I answered some questions of the media earlier as they relate to how you could with common sense legislate some of these and then enforce them. I look at the minimum of one year with restricted passengers in a vehicle and think of my own family as they grew up in rural Alberta and some of the logistics of trying to enforce that. I look at a curfew from midnight to 5 a.m., thinking of the various ways that our youth work and people work in this province and am aware that that would be a terrible weight on some families if you had to enforce that curfew. I see alcohol restriction here being limited to .03. I think of the laws we have that say that 18 year olds and under don't drink at all in this province. Why would you limit it to .03 when it's a redundant law? We already have an absolute law that says: zero tolerance in 18 year olds and under while they drive.

MR. WICKMAN: Secondly, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: has the minister considered such measures as mandatory driver education, mandatory defensive driving courses, and a more restrictive demerit system for new drivers?

DR. WEST: Those issues that you just mentioned certainly could be looked at. As we go forward, certain of our laws do make it almost mandatory, when you look at our insurance premiums and other things that are in force, to have better education and driver training. I think of my own children - I have four children - and how I want them to come into the world of driving as safely as they can. I send them to driver training schools, and I would expect a lot of people would, although they're expensive. I know that training my own children is probably a detriment to them rather than a merit to their driving habits.

I will take the recommendations you just made and look at them, but when you start imposing certain legislation and enforcement of rules, that is something I would look at very carefully in a free, democratic society.

3:00 Alberta Educational Communications Corporation

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, it's a rare day when the Calgary-Fish Creek constituency is impacted by government-related layoffs and closures. Access Network announced today the closure of their Calgary office, a productive Access Network facility with six employees. Apparently the intention is that most of Access' services will now be consolidated in Edmonton. After years of government office decentralization away from Edmonton, how can the Deputy Premier, the minister of public works, justify this plan to revert to the outdated policy that everything's got to be in Edmonton?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's 1993, and there are realities with respect to new budgets and fiscal management, fiscal realities that are very important. Earlier today senior management of Access corporation pointed out that one of their offices would be

closed down. It affects a number of employees who currently work in Calgary, but they'll be consolidating here, back to their Edmonton operations.

MR. PAYNE: Well, Mr. Speaker, the folks in Calgary-Fish Creek don't derive a whole lot of satisfaction from that response.

I'm wondering if the minister would be prepared to clarify what government assistance or counseling will be provided to those six employees in the Calgary Access office once the doors are shut for the last time in June?

MR. KOWALSKI: Employees in Calgary, Mr. Speaker, have been offered transfers to Edmonton at the closedown of the Calgary office on June 30, 1993.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Home Water Systems Inc.

MR. CHIVERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have for filing a package of documents detailing the unethical sales practices of an Edmonton water treatment retailer. A senior couple was badgered until midnight by two salesmen for Home Water Systems of Edmonton. The company misleadingly got the couple to sign a document which turned out to be a Treasury Branch loan application for \$2,800 that was subsequently processed without their authorization. The company then refused to take the distiller back within the 21-day trial period. Will the Premier please tell the Assembly precisely what action he intends to stop this firm's unethical practices, which have been raised in this House previously?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I didn't know it was my fault.

MR. FOX: Everything is.

MR. KLEIN: Everything is, I'm sure.

If the hon. member will provide me with the information, I'll have the appropriate authorities investigate. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, who's charged with this department, could add to my answer.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm amazed that the hon. member, who's a lawyer himself, doesn't understand that there are certain areas that the private sector do deal with through 5,085 lawyers in this province. There are dispute mechanisms for people that run amok of operations that aren't credible or who deliver a service that they might not be pleased with.

I was given a list today. I see that it's National Consumer Week in Canada. One of the things we're trying to do is get government out of the role of intervention and get private-sector involvement to settle disputes between individuals who purchase a service and those companies that are licensed properly. I see that this week the Better Business Bureau in Calgary has a dispute settlement centre set up. It provides a low-cost alternative to the court process for some types of consumer/business complaints. Edmonton should soon have one of those centres up and running. I see others. The Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society and Canadian Bar Association, of which you're probably a member, are sponsoring mock mediations at the Calgary courthouse and the Edmonton city hall to show consumers how mediation works and how to promote the services of their society.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but maybe I can address that . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Maybe you could, but you can't. [interjections]
Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Filing Documents

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair is checking about the filing. The understanding I have at the moment is that it was – the issue may indeed be important – an article rather than a letter, but we'll just check.

MR. CHIVERS: Mr. Speaker, if I might just address that.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, it's part of your supplementary. You can address it, but the clock is still running.

Home Water Systems Inc. (continued)

MR. CHIVERS: Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised that I didn't get an answer to that question from the minister.

The truth is that I do know, and we did attempt to follow the processes, as did the elderly couple concerned here, but were unsuccessful in achieving a satisfactory resolution. The reason is that lax laws and laxer enforcement have resulted in an open season on consumers in Alberta. Will the minister responsible for consumer protection explain why Albertans are virtually unprotected against sharp operators preying on vulnerable consumers such as the elderly, the poor, and the disabled?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has in this department alone 31 pieces of legislation which responsibly address licensing and protection of the consumer. We have a whole plethora of dispute settlement mechanisms in this province as well as licensing of businesses in municipalities. If the hon. member would please bring forward the details of this and have the people write me, I'll see that if this company is outside the mechanisms put in place by municipalities and those licensing Acts, we will certainly have the Better Business Bureau and others look at it and see if these people have run amok of society or run amok of services by an individual company that has to be settled through a dispute mechanism.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo.

MLA Pensions

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A long-time Tory, a Tory who has benefited, sir, from a \$1.5 million interest free loan from the federal Conservative government, has paid for an ad in Calgary daily newspapers, an ad about MLA pensions, an ad which is misleading. This question is to the Premier. What role did his staff play in this misinformation campaign?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I appreciate that the hon. member has sent me this particular ad, and I'm pleased that a supporter of mine along with other concerned Albertans has put the facts before the public, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. KLEIN: I didn't pay for it, and I didn't write the ad.

MR. DECORE: Your staff.

MR. MITCHELL: Rod Love?

MR. KLEIN: Are you saying that Rod Love wrote this?

MR. DECORE: Ask him.

MR. KLEIN: Are you saying that he wrote it? Then you'd better back it up, and you'd better say it outside the House. I have no idea who wrote this particular ad, nor did I have anything to do with it. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections]

MR. KLEIN: Say it outside the House.

MR. DECORE: Who wrote it?

MR. KLEIN: Make your accusation outside the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

At last report it was Calgary-Buffalo who had the floor. It wasn't five members of the Liberal caucus.

MR. TAYLOR: How about the 45 on the other side?

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given the misinformation which appears in the ad and the reference to red herrings, will the Premier acknowledge in this Legislative Assembly today that retroactivity is no red herring; retroactivity is the real issue for Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: I will acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that the whole issue of pensions is before the Legislature, and if the Liberals or one of their sponsors or supporters want to put an ad in the newspaper, I'm not going to complain about it. I just quote the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition from a newspaper article. He said, and I quote: it's unlikely a new pension plan with reduced benefits could be applied retroactively to MLAs because of legal problems in making changes. That comes from the mouth of the leader of the Liberal opposition. So what are they talking about?

MR. TAYLOR: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Thank you.

3:10

Beef Imports

MR. FISCHER: My question is to the minister of agriculture. Record high cattle prices in Canada have been a lifesaver for the agriculture industry during these low grain prices. Given that Alberta produces 46 percent of the cattle, it's vital that we don't have unfair trading practices in this country. These high prices have attracted dramatic increases in offshore imports, and Australian beef in 1993 is already four times greater than the previous levels. Are there any limits on the number of offshore beef that can be brought into this country?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately at this time not any enforceable limits. There've been historic agreements with Australia and New Zealand that they would stay below certain negotiated limits. My office is currently communicating with the federal minister to encourage them to develop a beef import law in Canada parallel to the one that is in the U.S.A.

MR. FISCHER: Given that the U.S. is our major market, how is the U.S. reacting to Canada importing all of this Australian beef?

MR. ISLEY: It's fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that the U.S. has certainly observed the increase. Their reaction to date has been to ban any more so-called commingled beef from moving south of the border. Commingled beef means you grind up meat that comes out of Australia and New Zealand and then mix it with beef that is raised in Canada. They have closed the border on the commingled beef.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Belmont, followed by Westlock-Sturgeon.

Workers' Compensation Board

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Labour about a change in the mission statement for the Workers' Compensation Board. Today I'd like to ask the minister about some other surprising developments that have taken place at the board. It's regarding the employees that were terminated recently. In order for those employees to access the severance package that was due to them, they had to sign a document that denied them access to see their member of the Legislature. I believe that all members of the Legislature ought to be offended by the Workers' Compensation Board dictating what constituents can or cannot say to their members of the Legislature. Does the Minister of Labour condone the Workers' Compensation Board's attempt to interfere with MLAs' responsibility to represent their constituents, especially in light of the fact that the Workers' Compensation Board is now on the hook to the taxpayer for approximately \$600 million?

MR. DAY: Well, the member opposite has raised a number of issues, Mr. Speaker. A discussion on the unfunded liability is one that certainly I would welcome, because there are some very positive things happening to address that particular challenge.

As far as people who were terminated at WCB, an evaluation was done based on certain factors, including increased levels of technology being used at WCB, and some tough decisions had to be made in terms of the staff there being reduced. Those aren't the types of decisions that make anybody happy, but in fact to lower administration costs and to make the system more streamlined for workers, that had to be done. Any other details in terms of things that were entered into individually with workers that I don't have right before me, I can hardly address. If the member opposite has some information to that effect that he'd like me to look at, I'd be happy to do so.

MR. SIGURDSON: Certainly, I will, Mr. Speaker.

It's important that Albertans know precisely what's going on inside the Workers' Compensation Board. The reports were that those layoffs were targeted at visible minorities and workers who had recently taken sick leave or maternity leave or who in fact were on workers' compensation benefits. These are very serious allegations that I'm making, and I would ask that the minister conduct an investigation of those terminations to determine whether or not my allegations are true.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I don't think I can underline how irresponsible the suggestion is from the member opposite. Anything resulting in or leading up to any discussion of minorities or people being singled out for reasons other than seeing this organization become as streamlined as possible personally I take

as just a highly irresponsible comment. The member opposite knows that the media will pick it up and run with it and get all kinds of people upset. There is absolutely no substance whatsoever to these ridiculous comments that anybody would have been singled out because of their ethnic background, and I think it is just nothing but irresponsible to even have that suggestion.

MR. SPEAKER: For the record the Chair notes that no filings have taken place.

Westlock-Sturgeon.

Pork Processing Industry

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is to the minister of agriculture. Over two years ago this government commissioned a report on the hog industry which basically said that if the Gainers plant and the Fletcher's Red Deer plant were put together, farmers would get about \$10 to \$14 more per hog. Now, our minister didn't believe that and commissioned another report. Apparently this report also says that if all the killing is centralized in Red Deer and the processing is centralized up here, indeed hog producers would realize \$10 to \$14 more, and we'd be much more productive. My question, then, is: will the minister swallow his embarrassment at the government's hundred million dollar loss in Gainers and immediately release the second report so the public can make their own judgment?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon is a little bit confused, as normal. The first report that he talks about was an interim report done by the same committee that moved on to do the final report. The final report has been completed. It's known in certain sectors of the industry. Unfortunately, because of the sensitive nature of the finances of at least two companies that are in there, they have not been comfortable in giving us consent to release it.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, that's ridiculous. Since when do you need the consent of the report writers before you can release it if you paid them to get the report? It's got nothing to do with it.

MR. SPEAKER: Is that the question, hon. member?

MR. TAYLOR: It's a good agricultural product that he's spreading around here.

What I'd like to know is: how many more reports will we have to commission at taxpayers' expense before we find one that the minister agrees with?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I was under the mistaken impression that this hon. member had a background in the private sector. If he did have that background, he should be very knowledgeable that before one company will open its books to assessment and study, there will normally have to be a confidentiality agreement signed, which prevents, then, that information from being released without the express consent of the company whose information it is.

The minister has no intention of commissioning any more reports. We are currently involved in negotiations with more than one firm in hopes of bringing about some rationalization of the pork processing industry in this province.

Sugar Beet Industry

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister of agriculture. A few years ago we had a tripartite agreement

with the sugar beet growers in Alberta. It is my information that this tripartite agreement was not making the sugar beet industry viable, so recently there has been a new agreement made with the sugar beet growers. Could the minister tell the Assembly what the difference is between the new agreement and the former one?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, the former tripartite agreement, which we're allowing to lapse – and fortunately we have no deficit to pick up on it – involved the sugar beet producers in Alberta and Manitoba and was a true tripartite program, although the support price was not adequate to provide the stability the industry needs. The premium in that first program was 3 percent producer, 3 percent federal government, 3 percent provincial government. The premium in the new one that was just agreed to this week is 5 percent producer, 5 percent province, 5 percent federal, and I believe the support price is \$37 a tonne.

3:20

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Speaker, the supplementary is: I wonder if the minister could tell the Assembly how this compares to other tripartite agreements, such as the cattle industry or grain industry, as far as tripartite is concerned.

MR. ISLEY: The premium level in the sugar beet one is higher than, I would say, probably all of the other ones.

Printing Practices

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, my question this afternoon is to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. I understand that the printing and graphic arts association, which consists mainly of private-sector printing businesses, met recently with the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services and proposed amalgamating the small printing and DocuTech operations in about 10 of the largest government departments into the Queen's Printer in the name of cost efficiency. My question to the minister is: has he come to any conclusions on that matter?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, a number of conclusions with respect to the presence of DocuTech printers within the confines of the government of Alberta. It seems that in the last year, year and a half a number of agencies associated with the government have obtained these very sophisticated laser-type printers, and we're undertaking a review right now to see what role they are playing within the whole confines of the organization known as the government of Alberta.

MR. GIBEAULT: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Queen's Printer has been underutilized since the government started contracting out the printing of government Bills, even though the building and the equipment are paid for. I'd like to ask the minister why the government will not commit today to job stabilization and cost efficiency by following those recommendations of the association and amalgamating those printing services, perhaps in the same vein in which he spoke earlier, in a positive sense, of amalgamating services at Access Network. Is it not the same situation?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the position put forward by the hon. member is a valid one, but there's also one other entity that has to be brought to this whole debate, and that is the whole question of the reality and the environment in which we're operating. We're also looking at the opportunities that exist within the private sector to provide this service as well. So there's a debate, a discussion, a review going on right now to see which

utilization is most cost efficient for the taxpayer of the province of Alberta, and the ultimate decision by the government would be to deliver the service that would provide the least amount of cost to Alberta's taxpayers.

MR. SPEAKER: Question period has expired. Might we have the consent of the House to revert to introductions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
Olds-Didsbury.

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

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 46 Olds junior high school students. They are accompanied today by their teachers Dale McFarland and Garry Woodruff and parents Kathleen Heinicke, Alice Arie, Ken Kinnear, Janeen Smith, and Val Bigelow. I wonder if they would stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair has had notice of two points of order: first one Camrose, the second one Westlock-Sturgeon.

Point of Order
Factual Accuracy

MR. ROSTAD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise just to clarify Sessional Paper 1099 that was circulated. In the comments last evening from the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry I thought I detected my name being mentioned as a – using those despicable words – double-dipping Tory backbencher, citing that I was getting \$11,293 in pension. I'd like to correct that for the record. I do not receive a pension. I had in fact applied for a pension when I was retiring, and on reconsidering running, that application was withdrawn, just for the record. I realize these are sourced from the Association of Alberta Taxpayers, and I cannot attest to the accuracy of anything that comes from them. I'd just like it for the record.

Thank you.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the note that he sent me wherein he indicated that he had made application to get these additional moneys but that he withdrew that application. I regret the inconvenience or any discomfort that I have caused him, and I apologize for that. I invite any of the other 13 to stand and tell me that I've made an error on their part as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. [interjections] Thank you, hon. members. I'm sure that verification and accuracy will follow. Sometimes outside documents are not necessarily the most valid sources for quoting.

Westlock-Sturgeon.

Point of Order
Filing a Cited Document

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's under Oral Questions all the way from 407 to 415. There's a practice that when any of us in the House have referred to something in a newspaper or written, you've asked that it be filed. Lately in session the Premier has taken to reading Liberal policy from the

book according to St. Laurence, I guess. I'd like to see it filed. I've long acquaintance with the Premier when he was in his previous occupation. He was known to skip words now and again when he was reading the news. I'm not saying that it was done on purpose or not on purpose, but it would be nice to ask that every time he quotes something from the gospel according to St. Laurence, he file that particular chapter so we could see it ourselves and read it, rather than read it out of *Hansard*. I've noticed that sometimes words are missing.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Premier in response to the statement made by the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, the government would be delighted to table in the future these documents that are being referred to. You can expect quite a rash of them, some very interesting statements, not taken out of context either and not used for slanderous or any other kind of purpose but to correct the record. The Liberals have given us ample opportunity to say what they stand for, and it tends to change from day to day and from source to source and issue to issue. So you'll see a lot of paper.

It would be just an absolute delight for the government to deal with the point of order put forward by the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon. It's so easy. Thank you, hon. member.

MR. SPEAKER: Such an agreeable House.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 387.

[Motion carried]

Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd.

387. Mr. Mitchell asked the government the following question: With regard to the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation's joint venture partner Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. how much did Chem-Security earn from its sale of services during the fiscal year ended March 31, 1991, other than those funds contributed by the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation?

MR. DAY: The government will accept.

head: **Motions for Returns**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that the motions for returns on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places, with the exception of the following: motions for returns 199, 231, and 385.

[Motion carried]

Olympia & York Developments Limited

199. Mr. McEachern moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the lease agreement between the government and Olympia & York Developments Limited regarding the rental of office space at 10155-102nd Street, Edmonton, and all other documents and reports that provide information on the cost of this agreement.

MR. DAY: Motion 199, the government will reject, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further debate on the motion for a return, Edmonton-Kingsway, and summation.

MR. McEACHERN: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments to remind people because it happened a long time ago. The Olympia & York development took place a number of years ago at a time when there were lots of empty rental spaces downtown. It was totally unnecessary. A couple of government friends made a contract with Olympia & York to talk them into the project. The government decided to move into that project at a time when already they had lots of rental space of their own and had to leave some of their own buildings empty.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

We've never been able to get the government to tell us these numbers, so we have certainly been waiting for them for a long time. I just hope that the answer is as comprehensive and as complete as the question calls for. Rumours have floated that the rates paid by the government to Olympia & York were in the neighbourhood of \$18.50 per square foot when the going rate was \$10 to \$12 a square foot at the time. All the downtown businesspeople were very upset: if the government needed more rental space, they certainly didn't need to build new rental space to get that space.

3:30

So, Mr. Speaker, this has been one of the greatest boondoggles of the Tory government. I'm sure that it has cost the taxpayers a lot of money, and I certainly hope that the information we get is more thorough than the information I got on the last motion for a return. I asked about the Alberta stock savings plan, and the minister said: well, if you change the question a little bit to this and this and this, you know, then I'll give you the information. I said that some information is better than none, so, yes, I'll accept that. The information we got was minimal, almost useless, and keeps the taxpayers of the province as much in the dark about what went wrong with the Alberta stock savings plan as we were before the release. I just say that if this release doesn't give any more information, then we're certainly not going to believe that this government is going to give us the open and honest open-the-books-to-the-people-of-Alberta approach that they claim they are. So I look forward to the actual facts and getting the details.

[Motion lost]

Point of Order Clarification

MR. McEACHERN: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. My understanding was that the minister had said that he would give us the information for 199. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair distinctly heard the Deputy Government House Leader say that the government was rejecting Motion 199.

MR. McEACHERN: I guess I just didn't hear it.

MR. DAY: I don't know how much more clearly I could have said it, Mr. Speaker: reject. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order.
The hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon.

Olympia & York Developments Limited

231. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the lease agreement between the province and Olympia & York Developments Limited for 40,000 square feet of office space in Olympia & York's new office/retail complex between 101st and 102nd streets and Jasper Avenue and Manulife Place in Edmonton.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that my Motion 231 is very similar to 199. I suspect that the answer will be very similar too.

In speaking for it, Mr. Speaker, there are two reasons why I think the public of Alberta would like to know what was signed between the two. I think it is something that the recent committee that the Premier commissioned to look into the economic affairs of the province – if they'd had more than the five or six days that the Premier allowed them, and even at that, of course, they dug up enough to make a mountain. They would have made something the size of Everest if they'd got into the whole question of leasing of office space.

There's no question, Mr. Speaker, as you go about this town, that there are literally thousands of square feet of former government space that is empty. The government, in anticipation I guess, like pharaohs or something like that, that they would be in for maybe an eon or an eternity, leased this office space back in the good old days for a price that's roughly two and a half to three times, as near as we can gather, what the going rate was. It's costing the public of Alberta, from my estimates, around something like \$3 million more a year in rent than they should be paying.

Now, the reason that we're also interested in having this filed is that one of the friends of the former Premier or somebody wired into this party was known to have received a very, very good commission indeed for putting together this agreement. So, Mr. Speaker, it's very important that the government clear its name, because it's known in every real estate office, every byway, every bar in this province about the golden deal that they signed with the Olympia & York people. The fact of the matter is that the Reichmanns from Toronto – it's very, very difficult to fool very many people, but they really had a tame duck when it came to Alberta and the Olympia & York presentation. I think the government would want to clear their reputation, to try to let the public know that they hadn't been taken for such big saps, as it would appear to have been, in paying anywhere from two and a half to three times per square foot on a long-term lease, empty their other buildings to fill up a new building here by a company that is now talking about going into receivership. All in all, a very seamy story indeed. I'm sure that the member opposite will seize this opportunity – I hope he'll seize this opportunity – to try to prove to the public of Alberta that the government isn't really as stupid as it would appear.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to add a few sentences to what's been said already. I guess if we look back over the last 10 years of the Tory reign, we can see a number of issues where there has been a dramatic lack of information that continuously come back to haunt the Tory government, such as NovAtel, the Gainers' deal, the Principal deal, the Dial deal, and Olympia & York to a lesser extent than NovAtel, mind you. Still it is one of those situations that the public has sniffed out and has

questions as to whether everything was just totally businesslike in the sense of: was it competitive? Could the province have gotten a better deal? Did some people associated with BOMA, the Building Owners Management Association, for example, lose out in the process?

This is one of those things that has probably been on the Order Paper now for the last 5 or 6 or 7 years. It continues to come back, and it will continue to come back as long as this government is here. Possibly that won't be that much longer. It's one of those things that the government just fails to deal with, because the government would find itself, I would suspect, in an extremely embarrassing position if they were to come forward with what is suspected to be a sweetheart deal.

I think it's ironic that this very afternoon the lead-off of question period by both opposition leaders was directed at the so-called freedom of information Act. It was clearly pointed out by the Member for Edmonton-Glenarry that by leaking certain information, one could be penalized \$5,000. I guess that brings to mind: if I somehow got my hands on this agreement that's referred to in Motion 231 and I so-called leaked it or did my public responsibility of providing it to a constituent or whoever may ask me, does that mean, then, that I would be subject to a \$5,000 fine? The rejection of this motion, the rejection of that last motion demonstrates that that paper that the Premier brought down yesterday, his document that has been multiplied now thousands of times over and I suspect is going to be circulated throughout all parts of the province as part of some type of campaign promotion using taxpayers' dollars, is nothing but smoke and mirrors. The sincerity isn't there.

Mr. Speaker, the day is coming. In fact, it could very well come. In 28 days from Monday night at 10 o'clock we could see a new government in place, a government that is prepared to provide the openness that Albertans are expecting from their elected representatives, that accountability we keep hearing about. Twenty-eight days from Monday at 10 o'clock: mark that in your book, Dianne.

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

MR. McEACHERN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't resist putting in a few words on this motion. Motion 231 is so similar to Motion 199, basically asking for information on the lease for the Olympia & York property and the Alberta government's purchase of that space. I cannot understand why – and I just misheard, I guess, the deputy House leader's comment. I thought he'd indicated that he was intending to give us that information. The pained look on his face that says, "How could you expect that we would possibly release that information?" just tells me how far this group is from really believing that they're a different and new and open and honest government. They keep using those words, but they're just fatuous nonsense to try to calm the people of Alberta into voting for them again.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, it strikes me as extraordinary that any government would have the gall to spend the taxpayers' dollars on that level and then systematically refuse to tell the taxpayers what they're doing. I guess after seven years I should be used to it, but it still comes to me as so unacceptable that I find that I keep thinking that somewhere along the way we will find some little decent spark of honesty that says, "Yeah, well, we really should tell the taxpayers what's going on." But I can find none. I look across the floor on the other side and I see none. Here's just another

example. It's as if they want to rub our nose in it by bringing these things forward today and then saying, "We're not going to tell you what's going on; we're just going to reject them." I mean, these are important questions, and the people of Alberta have the right to know. I cannot understand how they can have the gall to sit there and reject such a motion. So be it. We will be on the hustings soon, and we will tell Albertans over and over again exactly what they're doing and what they're not doing, and they'll be sorry.

MR. DAY: Well, I've overcome the fear of seeing the member opposite on the hustings. He almost had me shivering in my seat and unable to stand because of weakness in the knees. Having overcome that, I'm able to stand and say a couple of things.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that when we stand to address these items, these written questions and motions for returns, I make it very clear what the decision of the government has been, either accept or reject. So for the member opposite to say that I'd said otherwise, when I've already rejected – he just misheard it – I think it's something he should just let go of.

It's also quite exciting to see under the administration of Premier Klein the openness of this government and the willingness to bring information out that the public needs to know; as a matter of fact, going as far as tabling and moving to pass, if the opposition will allow us, a freedom of information Act. That's something that the member opposite commented about. It's something we're moving on. I've personally said in the past that we need this type of thing, but I've also said that there are a number of pieces of legislation of various types in place now that do guarantee freedom of information to Albertans. What's going to happen now is that there'll be an amalgamation of these various Acts and pieces of legislation under one umbrella Act so that it will be much more simplified for Albertans to access information. In a case like this particular one, where there are obvious procedural difficulties with certain motions and on those bases the government rejecting them, that may not be able to happen, but it is very exciting to see the openness both in form and content of this administration.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. McEACHERN: A point of order.

MR. DAY: I really wonder what the citation is here.

MR. McEACHERN: Would the minister mind explaining what the procedural problem is with these motions?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation.

MR. McEACHERN: I don't need a citation to take him up on his own words. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please.

Edmonton-Kingsway, if you have a similar question, again you do not rise on a point of order. You rise and ask the minister whether he will take your question.

MR. McEACHERN: What's the procedural problem?

MR. DAY: Well, again, he doesn't rise. He just shouts and motions and tries to show how he can speak and drink water at the same time. None of us are really impressed with that.

Debate Continued

MR. DAY: On that basis, Mr. Speaker, and given the fact that the record will show that as we've entered both the new session in January and this session, every day we try to address a number of these questions and returns on the Order Paper. The vast majority of those are to accept.

When you look at this in any kind of detail – I'm not going to prolong this debate, Mr. Speaker – we've pointed out time and again with so many of these questions how the information is readily available. For lack of anything better to do, the members opposite sit around and dream up questions which actually cost a fair bit of resource to dig into and get, but anything to satisfy them.

Point of Order

Tabling Documents

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation.

MR. TAYLOR: Citation 407. It's just to tell the hon. gentleman that the Liberal caucus will pay for the cost of photocopying that agreement. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair would remind the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon that the hon. member will be recognized immediately after the Deputy Government House Leader finishes. The hon. member could make that same comment at that time.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I have researched citation 407 as brought forward by the member. This is a reflection of the ability for members of the Liberal Party to be accurate, because what 407 is referring to is the fact that “a specified period is set aside daily for the asking of oral questions and replies thereto.” So another reflection of the Liberal caucus at work, and I think it speaks for itself. On that basis we reject this particular Motion for a Return.

Debate Continued

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, to close debate.

MR. TAYLOR: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to make two points: one, this particular motion does not call for research in any large piles or large copies of agreements or indeed maybe the agreement like the last Member for Three Hills' files. They might have disappeared in a cart someplace and got burnt or maybe chopped up.

This is just one simple agreement, Mr. Speaker. It says quite clearly here “a copy of the lease agreement.” I've been involved in many lease agreements through the years. Some of them good. None of them as advantageous to me as this one obviously was. The cost will be very small. I'd like to let the House know that not only will we pay the cost of photocopying this lease agreement, if that's what they're worried about, but we'll also make 82 other copies so the rest of their back bench can see how cleverly and how smoothly their own administration was shafted. That's all we need. There's no pile of documents. I know that the lease won't be more than 20 pages at the most. Maybe if we put schedules A, B, C, D, and E on, there may be more. We won't even need the schedules. All we need is the lease agreement, and that's all the hon. member has to file.

If he will just dial, I will even be willing to give him the number. It was under the minister of agriculture. The minister of agriculture was the one that signed the lease on behalf of the government at that time. Even he may be able to recall a nightmare lease like that. I know that he was told by the Premier and the Premier's campaign chairman to sign: don't ask what it's about; put your X mark here. The minister of agriculture said: “Where? Where? Okay; I'll put my X mark there.” All we need is a copy of the X mark and the lease, and we'll pay for every bit of it. No research, no pile to level. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I will come over personally to the department of public works office and tell them what file it's in. I will just take a minute. It's likely filed under L for leases and O for Olympia & York. Very simple. They won't have more than one whole shelf. I'll get it out for them and photocopy it.

What a farce, Mr. Speaker, to now get up and say: we're going to put rules, we're going to have open information, we're going to have a right of information. One simple lease document between a company that's gone bankrupt, between a company that's known to be in lots of lease trouble and a government that has also gone bankrupt, or if it isn't bankrupt, it's bankrupt morally, of course, and is approaching bankruptcy financially. That's all it is: a lease between two bankrupt entities lurking in the file over there, unless it was written in disappearing ink or on incendiary paper, nestling there in the file probably turning yellow with age but still quite copyable, that we could give out to the people of Alberta.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they come out and use the farce of saying: oh, this is going to take lots of work; all they ask are silly questions. Well, the Member for Red Deer-North, of course, knows what silly questions are about. That's how he got elected. Nevertheless, the Member for Red Deer-North has been given an impossible task to defend the indefensible and say now why they can't come up with a simple lease agreement between the people of Alberta and Olympia & York, probably two of the best known, high-profile, worst money managers in the last 10 years. It's an agreement that we'd like to see filed, if nothing else, to put in our schools and our libraries to tell posterity what type of a government we once had, what type of a minister of public works we once had, and what type of a party, possibly, we once had, who tried to save themselves by bringing in a PR expert and a smooth talker from Calgary.

3:50

The fact of the matter is that they are going to have to go to the electorate and be able to defend what they've done. This is why the Member for Red Deer-North is sitting there covering dirt, throwing straw, twisting his horns a little bit, and bellowing now and again, Mr. Speaker, making noises. But you can't graft a set of horns on a mouse. It's still a mouse. The fact is that they haven't got the courage to come out with the agreement. You can make them look tough, you can make them look worried, you can even graft another appendage on them, but they still bellow and make the noise and can't do what they're supposed to do. All we asked this member to do is go back in that file under L for lease and O for Olympia, and we will pay the photocopying ourselves.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Hotchkiss River Basin

385. On behalf of Mr. Mitchell, Mrs. Hewes moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing any

hydrological analyses carried out within the Hotchkiss River basin between January 1, 1980, and July 31, 1992.

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

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've taken a look at this motion, and I have moved an amendment which I believe has been circulated. It's really in the interest of clarity. I'm certainly prepared to provide information to the hon. member in keeping with our government's attitude about openness.

However, in reviewing the motion, I think what the hon. member is getting at is the impact of timber harvesting operations in the basin, and therefore I am proposing an amendment that would take out the word "any" in front of "hydrological analyses" and substituting "the results of" and at the end of the motion ending with "July 31, 1992" adding "related to timber harvesting operations in the basin." I believe that is agreeable to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. HEWES: It's acceptable, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion as amended carried]

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Worksite Safety

232. Moved by Mr. Gibeault:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to implement joint worksite health and safety committees to assure workers' rights to know the hazards they are dealing with, to enable participation of workers in the development and implementation of safety procedures, programs, and standards, and to permit workers the opportunity to refuse to do any unsafe work without suffering prejudice or penalty.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy this afternoon to speak to the motion that I submitted sometime ago. The reason that we've submitted this motion is because tragically still in the province of Alberta in 1993 we are looking at a situation where many workers are exposed to unnecessary risk, to hazards, to potential disabilities, to exposure, to toxic chemicals and products, more of which are being developed daily. Yet there are so few opportunities for workers to ensure some degree of protection from these hazards.

Now, we know that the government has shown a very modest, a very limited commitment to protecting the health and safety of workers in the province. We know, for example, that there are more officers who are responsible for protecting wildlife than there are inspectors for health and safety in the workplaces of this province. We know as well that a very small percentage of workplaces are subject to any kind of an inspection in any given year. In fact, there are many worksites in this province, Mr. Speaker, that have never, never received a visit by an occupational health and safety officer to determine what hazards may be there or to assist in an educational process to assist workers and employers in trying to enhance the health and safety of that particular workplace.

The problem that we've developed in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, is that there is never, it seems now, any kind of proactive involvement on the part of the government through the department of

occupational health and safety, and it's simply a crisis management kind of situation. There are only investigations that come forward during an accident on a job, a fatality on a job, and it's fine to have an occupational health and safety officer going out, as has happened on more than one occasion at the Daishowa site, to inspect the site after someone has been killed, but that's a bit late. What this motion is trying to suggest to the government is that if the government is not going to accept that responsibility for health and safety, then let us try to encourage workers and representatives of the management of enterprises – whether they're in the public sector, the private sector, the quasi-public sector, co-operatives, you name it, whatever kind of an enterprise it is – sit down together and determine what kinds of changes may need to be made in their workplace to ensure the health and safety of their workers.

These vary from occupation and business and trade all over the province. So I think – I hope the government will agree – that it's in the public interest to ensure that we have workers and their employers involved in monitoring the health and safety of their workplace. We know that even at the best of times, even when we form the government after the next election, we may not be able to have health and safety officers to inspect worksites on a regular basis as often as perhaps should be done. So if the government is in agreement of the limitation on government resources – and we all understand the problems that are faced by government these days in their finances – I hope that they will support this motion, because this motion will not cost the government anything.

This motion will ensure that the main responsibility and authority for action on health and safety issues rests where it most properly belongs, and that is with the workers and the employers at the particular worksite. They're the ones who know. They're the people who do the work on a regular basis. They're the ones who know the hazards and the problems that are being faced there. They're the ones who know when a situation becomes unsafe and when production should stop or work should stop because of a hazard. They're the ones that are familiar with the remedial actions that may be taken. These vary whether it's a production plant like a Gainers facility or a roofing situation, which is a high-risk industry, or perhaps more commonly now in the age of high-tech workers who work in office environments, who work on the computers and word processors of the modern office, who develop tendonitis problems by virtue of the repetitive stress injuries of working on keyboards over and over.

In each of those particular worksite environments it's the workers who have to deal with the problems themselves in co-operation with their employers. If we had these health and safety committees who had real power, real teeth to investigate complaints from workers about problems in their workplace and to make sure that the enterprise took its responsibility seriously to ensure that protection was in place, that workers were not exposed unduly to hazards, and that workers had proper input into making sure that their workplaces were as safe as possible – now, this is not, Mr. Speaker, only for the benefit of the people in the work force of the province. That's certainly got to be our main consideration. I'm trying to argue here for arguments that I hope will attract the government's attention. Sometimes the health and interests of workers are not strong enough arguments for the Conservative members opposite, so let me suggest a couple of other benefits that may appeal to them more. They want to see a reduction in the claims and costs that are associated with workers' compensation. The minister earlier today made reference to the problems of the unfunded liability of workers' compensation. If we have workplaces that have workers and employers working

together to reduce accidents and to minimize injuries and disabling conditions, workers' compensation won't have to pay out so much. That will reduce the liability problem that the WCB faces, and it may even result in reductions that employers have to pay on workers' compensation premiums. So, Mr. Speaker, there are just so many benefits not only to government but to employers, to society at large, and to the workers of our province in having these mandatory joint worksite health and safety committees. I am looking forward with expectation for the Minister of Labour to endorse this concept and move it forward.

4:00

It has been introduced in other jurisdictions. In the organized sector of the economy where there are collective agreements in place, most of them provide for health and safety committees. It's a standard provision in most collective agreements. Most forward-thinking, sensible, progressive employers also realize the benefit of these kinds of committees to make sure that their workers are productive, are healthy, that they don't have accidents that cause lost time and lost production, and so on. So there are a lot of initiatives that have already been taken here. What we're suggesting to the government is that they could simply use their legislative authority to ensure a level playing field, to make sure that all employers are required to establish these committees so that you don't have employers who are chiseling corners and trying to always find the cheap way of doing things saying, "Well, no, we're not required to do this, so we won't." Therefore, you're basically penalizing the responsible employers in this province, Mr. Speaker. We don't want that. We want to have a level playing field. Let's say to all employers in the province, "We want to make sure that you have at your worksites around the province health and safety committees that involve the workers and representatives of the employer to make sure that we have safe and healthy worksites all over the province."

Now, I could just review a few of the problems that have come up just in the last few years, Mr. Speaker, that I believe would have been eliminated if we had had health and safety committees at every worksite in this province. For example, we had just a few years ago the problem of lead contamination at the battery recycling plant in Medicine Hat. It took a tremendous amount of government energy and time and effort to try to straighten out a problem after the fact – all kinds of medical treatment for these people who developed lead poisoning – all of which could have been eliminated if there had been a health and safety committee active in that particular plant making sure that workers were not exposed unduly to the lead hazard, that they showered properly after being exposed to this, that there were showers available for them, that there was a proper change of clothing, and all those kinds of things. I mean, that's just one example.

We have, as I mentioned earlier, the number of deaths at the Daishowa plant that perhaps could have been avoided. We had the situation that I brought to the attention of the minister just recently about the Superwood industries plant here in town. He indicated in the reply – and I appreciate his being fairly prompt in getting this investigated and taking some action here. This is another example. There is no health and safety committee at the plant. The department of occupational health and safety only acts when there's a complaint, Mr. Speaker. Despite the Occupational Health and Safety Act provisions saying that workers are not obligated to do work that is unsafe, in so many facilities and plants around the province you have the condition where workers, especially in this economic climate of recession, are afraid to lodge a complaint because the employer could just send them

packing down the road. I mean, that's the kind of environment we're in.

If the government is not in a position or does not have the political will to have an aggressive health and safety presence in the workplaces of our province, then I am urging them to adopt my motion and ensure that employers all over Alberta have these health and safety workplace committees that can try to deal with some of these problems, whether it's noise problems or exposure to hazardous chemicals or lack of first aid kits or other material in case of an accident or injury.

There are just so many things, Mr. Speaker, that could be done to improve the health and safety record in the province. I'm sure the minister's got to share my concern about the huge number of accidents and lost-time claims that are filed every year in our province: something like 60,000 every year. How many of those could be reduced? How many injuries could be prevented? How many fatalities could be prevented? Think of all the grief and suffering that is involved in those situations for the families involved, let alone the problems of the particular workplace where these things happen.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me just express as strongly as I can to the Minister of Labour and to his government to support this motion to have joint worksite health and safety committees established at all worksites in the province so that the workers of Alberta can ensure that they can go to their workplace and not compromise their health or their safety just to earn a living to support their families. So I urge very strongly all members of the Assembly to support this motion.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to participate in the debate on Motion 232, which is sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Safety is indeed an important topic, and it's of particular importance in employer/employee relationships, which we are discussing today, as addressed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Wood's motion.

As it is to those involved, the safety of Alberta workers is very important to our government and to all citizens of the province. It is something that we as government do not take lightly. We're open to hear ideas or ways in which we could better protect the health and safety of workers. However, in considering new ideas and initiatives, we must be careful that the measures we adopt and the actions that we take do not adversely affect those whom we are seeking to protect. With this point in mind I am unfortunately not convinced that Motion 232 would serve to better facilitate occupational health and safety in the province of Alberta. In fact, as it reads today, Motion 232 may actually do more harm than good.

With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I would like to look at a few specifics. Motion 232 urges our "government to implement joint worksite health and safety committees". Joint worksite health and safety committees are already implemented at worksites in the province. In fact, we even have a joint worksite health and safety committee, number 401, here at the Legislature. Presently there are at least 110 worksites which have committees which have been established by ministerial order under section 25(1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. In case there are hon. members who do not know, under section 25(1) it states:

The Minister may, by order, require that there be established at any work site a joint work site health and safety committee which shall

- (a) identify situations which may be unhealthy or unsafe in respect of the work site,
- (b) make recommendations to principal contractors, employers and workers for the improvement of the health and safety of workers at or on the work site,
- (c) establish and maintain educational programs regarding the health and safety of workers at or on the work site, and
- (d) carry out those duties and functions prescribed by the regulations.

There have also been committees established on a voluntary basis at approximately 2,000 worksites around the province. When you think of it, volunteerism carries with it personal commitment of all those who are involved in those committees. Point one of Motion 232 has therefore been accomplished: "to assure workers' rights to know the hazards they are dealing with." This right is already entrenched as part of our health and safety legislation.

Section 24 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act requires that a written report be prepared with respect to designated substances which may be present at a worksite. This report must be then kept on the worksite and must be available to anyone at the worksite, workers or otherwise.

Section 24.1 of the Act goes on to require that in cases where a controlled product is [either] used, stored . . . or manufactured at a work site, the employer . . . [must] ensure that

- (a) the controlled product is [properly] labelled,
- (b) a material safety data sheet . . . is made . . . available to workers, and
- (c) a worker . . . receives education, instruction or training [in regard] to the controlled product.

This is backed up further by section 15 of the general safety regulation. This section stipulates that employers must ensure that a known safety hazard which

- (a) cannot be readily controlled or eliminated, and
- (b) has the potential for causing serious injury

is identified and brought to the attention of [those] who may be exposed to the hazard.

Section 4 of the chemical hazards regulation requires that workers be informed when measures are made of airborne concentrations of harmful substances and that the workers affected be informed of the results of those measurements.

4:10

Section 5 of the same regulation dictates that an employer must inform workers of the nature and extent of exposures to substances in excess of their occupational exposure limit.

Sections 17(1), 17(2), 25(6), 27, and 34 are further examples of provisions ensuring workers' rights to know about the hazards to which they may be exposed in the course of their jobs. These particular sections pertain to the availability and disclosures of information with respect to the workplace hazardous materials information system, or WHMIS, as it's commonly referred to.

Motion 232 assumes that mandatory joint worksite health and safety committees are the only means of accomplishing point 2 of Motion 232:

To enable participation of workers in the development and implementation of safety procedures, programs, and standards.

The joint worksite health and safety committees established around the province are definitely one means by which Alberta's workers participate in the development and implementation of safety procedures, programs, and standards. As we have discussed, these committees can be established either through ministerial order or on a voluntary basis.

At this point I think it deserves mention that it is not only the legislated committees which are participating in the development and implementation of safety procedures, programs, and standards. Good examples of voluntary committees are the 118 committees

in place in different departments within our own government, Mr. Speaker. Syncrude and Suncor also have volunteer committees, and they are excellent examples of joint employer/employee participation in the development and study of health and safety programs, procedures, and standards. Indeed when traveling in various parts of Alberta, you can see billboards around worksites where the employers proudly state on the billboard how many safe days they have had in that particular plant or operation.

Mr. Speaker, it should not be overlooked that there are other mechanisms by which workers participate in health and safety issues at their jobsites. These mechanisms would not be strictly identified as joint worksite health and safety committees, yet they serve the same function and purpose, and they have been extremely successful. A prime example of this would be the worksite accident prevention council which is in place at Dow Chemical. Therefore, in considering this motion, members should keep in mind that making joint worksite health and safety committees mandatory is not the only means of enabling participation of workers in the development and implementation of safety procedures, programs, and standards.

One might suggest that Motion 232's third point is slightly regressive. It states, "to permit workers the opportunity to refuse to do any unsafe work without suffering prejudice or penalty." In light of our current legislation, this motion would at least have the appearance of being regressive. Section 27(1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act goes much further than permitting workers the opportunity to refuse unsafe work. This section obligates a worker to refuse work if he believes on reasonable and probable grounds that an imminent danger exists to either his own health and safety or that of his fellow workers. Subsections of section 27 go on to outline the procedures that a worker must follow in refusing such work and also what the employer must do to investigate and to eliminate the danger. In 1988 an amendment was introduced to this section of the Act which allows for the worker or employer to appeal an officer's finding to the Occupational Health and Safety Council if he is unsatisfied with the decisions of the officer. Section 28 of the Act then goes on to prohibit disciplinary action against a worker who has acted in compliance with the Act, the regulations or orders given under the Act.

Mr. Speaker, I believe there's not sufficient demand for the issues raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Before embarking on any changes, it must be determined whether or not there is sufficient demand to justify those changes. If there's not sufficient cause, changes then become unnecessary and may even be imprudent.

Mr. Speaker, in the 1990 winter issue of the *Occupational Health and Safety Magazine* the former hon. minister of occupational health and safety asked whether people would prefer mandatory or volunteer committees. Of the responses received from workers, employers, and industry experts, 64 percent indicated that they did not want mandatory committees. Further, responses in 1991 also indicate that there are more people now opposed to mandatory committees than those who support them. As a follow up to this, a voluntary committee registration form had been sent out in the spring issue of the *Occupational Health and Safety Magazine*.

Mr. Speaker, it seems clear that Motion 232 is not really worthy of further pursuit. It has some obvious flaws, like being outdated, outmoded, somewhat regressive, and perhaps out of step with those whom it would affect most. For those reasons I would encourage members of the Assembly to withhold their support of Motion 232.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to join in the debate on Motion 232 as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. The Member for Highwood read some interesting statistics regarding this particular motion. One of them, I believe he said, was that there are some 110 worksites that already have joint worksite health and safety committees in place, which is a nice little number. One of the curious things about statistics is that they can be used to tell a variety of different stories, and 110 taken by itself sounds like a laudable achievement. However, when you consider that in the province of Alberta there are somewhere between 63 and a half thousand and 64,000 Workers' Compensation Board assessment sites, what the member is telling us is that somewhere in the neighbourhood of one out of every 600 sites has a worksite health and safety committee. One out of 600 is scarcely appropriate.

In dealing with the motion which was before the House I guess in 1991 as a previous number but the same motion, the then minister at the time said that there were some 2,000 voluntary sites in total; 2,000 out of a total of 64,000 is still a fairly poor ratio. The Liberals support this motion, Mr. Speaker. The issue of jobsite safety is one that is important, is one that should be carried out by the workers.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, one of the curious things that I recall back in my university days – and I'm sure many people have had similar experiences; as you work through university, you get the opportunity to embark for at least a short time on a number of different careers. One of the things that I found is that the people who are doing the frontline job, whatever that particular frontline job is, are often the people who are the most knowledgeable about, first of all, how to make that job more effective and also the most knowledgeable about the issue of safety and safety concerns. So the concept of worksite health and safety committees to ensure that the workers have some input into what goes on seems to me to be not only practical but also logical.

When we look at this motion as it's presented – the idea of creating these joint committees – I guess the questions that the government has in mind are: why would we implement it here, and is it really necessary? When we look at other jurisdictions in Canada, there are a number of other jurisdictions that have implemented joint worksite health and safety committees. It's not mandatory in Alberta; it is, however, in other jurisdictions. This was a number of years ago, Mr. Speaker. So lest they leap to the conclusion inappropriately that it was put in by NDP governments, it was also in place in Ontario. It's been in place in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Manitoba. At least those were the ones which I could find most readily. So this is not something that is coming out of the wind and out of nowhere.

Mr. Speaker, the concept behind these is to get management on the one hand, who may know the organizational structure and the bottom-line figures about how to make the business work, to work together with the workers, as I said, who are on the frontline, whatever that particular frontline is. What it does, I think, in a couple of ways is that it promotes that spirit of co-operation. I recall attending a conference not long ago that was entitled Co-operate to Compete. I think one of the things this could lead to is that by reducing the number of injuries, by reducing the number of accidents, you reduce, as mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the number of Workers' Compensation Board claims that may need to be made. You build up a spirit of

trust between the workers and the management, which I think, Mr. Speaker, is certainly a laudable idea.

Mr. Speaker, worksite safety is a priority. I don't believe the member intends that every single worksite in the province must have a committee. I think one of the things we need to look at are some of the areas, some of the worksites that have had the most difficulty with respect to injuries in the past. One of the things that this would promote is an internal system. Rather than creating an extra workload for the minister or his department, I think what this proposal really does is put the onus back on the people who are in that particular business, whatever that business is, to look after themselves. I think that is certainly a strong direction for those worksites. In fact, I'm surprised that the government hasn't supported the motion, because really the intent of putting the onus back on the workers is very similar to a piece of legislation passed in this House not long ago, the Safety Codes Act, which really does take a lot of the responsibility out of the hands of government and puts it into private enterprise's. So it's kind of contradictory in doing this.

Mr. Speaker, the minister can designate and create and maintain some of these joint worksite health and safety committees, but it's interesting that at least as recently as we could find, there hadn't been any such designation by any minister of occupational health and safety since 1978, some 15 years so.

One of the things we discovered when we were looking into this particular motion is that when you deal with different worksites, there are obviously different numbers of employees at different worksites, and I would suggest that probably the fact is that not all worksites are going to require a committee like this, particularly when you have a small worksite which may only have a handful – four, five, six employees. There's hardly any need to establish a committee when you're dealing with such a small number. In a number of provinces I mentioned earlier – Ontario, British Columbia, and Manitoba – there is a cutoff of 20 workers. In other words, if you have less than 20 workers, there's not any need for a committee to be established, simply because all of your employees are working together on a regular basis. If you get into a larger worksite that has 20-plus employees – and of course there are some worksites that may have hundreds or perhaps even thousands of employees – certainly there's a need for a committee to focus primarily on the task of safety. Not all members at a worksite will have the time or the ability to focus on that as a particular concern. So when we look at the components, as the Member for Highwood did, of this particular motion, the concept of establishing committees such as these is a well-documented, well-precedented series of events that has occurred in other jurisdictions.

When we consider the concept of workers' rights to know the hazards they are dealing with, Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely critical that that occurs. The government through their WHMIS, hazardous materials legislation, is putting more and more onus on employees and employers to be sure about those chemicals or substances or materials that are on the worksite which may in fact be hazardous. It is important that that information then gets translated or relayed, if you will, to all of the employees on the worksite. So the concept of workers' rights to know the hazards that they are dealing with – I guess if the government says that this is already occurring, then there's certainly no need for the government to object to that and obviously would therefore support it. So again I find it difficult to understand why the Member for Highwood would take exception to that second clause.

The third clause, as mentioned, “to enable participation of workers in the development and implementation of safety procedures, programs, and standards,” is inherently logical and

practical. The individual on the front line is going to know on the basis of working in that situation what are the concerns, what are the hazards, what are the problems, and how can both safety and, probably also by increasing safety, productivity be increased. Mr. Speaker, by ensuring safe worksites, the management of that corporation or that company will also probably benefit because productivity at the worksite will also increase. Worker safety must be a priority.

The last clause the Member for Highwood referred to as regressive. I take some exception to that, because I have had workers come to me and express concern that they feared for their job because of their concerns about safety, either the safety of themselves on the worksite or perhaps even more importantly, Mr. Speaker, the safety of the public. Some worksites are very open, accessible to the public, and if an error were to occur, you could incur not only injury to the worker but to the public at large. As a case in point, think about your average swimming pool. We tend not to think terribly much about swimming pools being hazards, but most swimming pools in this province use chlorine as a water purifier. If there were an accident with chlorine, the result is that chlorine gas combines with water vapour in your lungs to form hydrochloric acid. The formation of hydrochloric acid in your lungs can be fatal. Perhaps only one worker, but you could have a number of people that are either near the area or in the pool itself who could be affected if an improper procedure were put in place for the handling of a relatively common, relatively frequently used chemical like chlorine. So the right of a worker to say, "Well, this is not safe and should be reconsidered," should be considered not only in the light of the employee and his or her employers in the immediate vicinity but also the public who is going to be potentially affected by that.

Mr. Speaker, in British Columbia there is such legislation, that has been in place for a number of years, as I pointed out. What happens in the procedure there is that the employee is asked to speak to his or her supervisor. As I pointed out before, the supervisor, although in the supervisory capacity, may not have sufficient on-hand working knowledge to deal with that particular situation. So if there is a problem, there is an arbitration process to go to a third worker, a third individual, and if it still cannot be resolved, in that province, at least, they go to the Workers' Compensation Board.

Mr. Speaker, this proposal before us today, Motion 232, is a motion that should not cost the government any additional money, which of course in this day and age of deficits and debts is a concern, and in fact in the long run could serve to save not only the government money but save private industry money by making our worksites safer and more productive. Therefore, I urge all members to support Motion 232.

Thank you.

4:30

[Mr. Main in the Chair]

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Lethbridge-East.

MR. GOGO: Far be it, Mr. Speaker, for an hon. humble member of the House to draw your attention to the fact, sir, that I represent Lethbridge-West. Be that as it may, I'm pleased, sir, to have the opportunity of . . .

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Lethbridge-West.

MR. GOGO: Thank you, sir. I'm pleased to have the opportunity of participating in debating the motion today put forward by

the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, Mr. Speaker. I'm taking that the hon. member is very concerned about the health and safety of workers in Alberta, although he doesn't state necessarily industrial workers.

I'd like to make various comments, Mr. Speaker, because I'm somewhat surprised by some of the comments that have been made. I think the lesson to be learned here by many members is to attend upon the House, listen to the debate, and ye shall become informed, because I was not aware that committee 401 was alive and well and active in the Legislative Assembly. Frankly, I've never seen people move fast enough to be injured, so I'm comforted by the thought that we have a committee here in the House that looks after health and safety factors. I'm indebted to the Member for Highwood for bringing that to our attention. What I'm somewhat puzzled by is that, as I understand it, the Minister of Labour, who will undoubtedly fill us in on this, has designated some 150 worksite committees around the province of Alberta. I assume that's been done because the advice to the minister was that it was required. I recall vividly the comment made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods about the lead situation at Medicine Hat some 18 months ago.

What concerns me however, Mr. Speaker, is that if the government was to implement the resolution, it raises with me several questions. First of all, as I understand it, whether one listens to the Hon. Sylvia Ostry of the economics department of Canada or a whole host of people across the country, some of them economists and others quite legitimate, in terms of why Canada and our provinces are noncompetitive, it's almost entirely due to the input cost of production in the nation. I raise the question with the hon. member as to what it would cost. To hear the Member for Calgary-North West, it wouldn't cost anything; as a matter of fact, government would save money. I'd be very interested to see how those savings would be realized, because as I understand it – in my constituency we've implemented a variety of policies. Certainly occupational health and safety, in terms of stopping projects at worksites – I'm not being critical of them. I know for a fact that they've done this in a variety of ways.

One incident comes to mind that happened not very long ago on a construction site, where a plumber had arrived obviously months and months before the construction was under way. It was a renovation of a building. He had to replace a leaky pipe, remove some asbestos about four feet long and about three inches in diameter. Pieces of that were lying on the ground. Occupational health and safety arrived and put a stop-work order on the site which lasted for 10 days and cost the town of Raymond \$10,000 to bring in people from the city of Calgary to look after this bit of asbestos. I now have a document which clearly indicates that the asbestos from applying the brakes in the city of Lethbridge on any busy day exceeds the asbestic fibre and dust level in the air that one would have experienced on that worksite.

One of the thoughts I have is: are we not going too far in terms of not clearly identifiable risky situations but using the strong arm of government to implement various programs without bearing in mind what the economic cost is, thereby making it not possible for our various people or small businesses to be competitive?

I was interested, Mr. Speaker, by two other items. One, there was no reference at all to the WHMIS project, which I understand is alive and well and has gone a tremendous ways in terms of worker safety and reduced accidents in Alberta. And the very fact that the strike rate – i.e., the work stoppages across Alberta – runs about 50 percent of the rest of Canada: I would think a union leadership to a great part would have made it evident that if the situation was that dangerous, there would have been more strike actions taken. Yet why are we in Alberta only 50 percent

compared to the rest of Canada? I'd like the hon. member or someone to explain to me why that's so.

I then go on, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me as well that the workers' compensation assessment rates here run on average about 72 percent to 75 percent of the province of British Columbia. Why would that be? One can only assume that there's some direct correlation between accidents – i.e., injuries at the worksite – and those claims. If our rates are only three-quarters of British Columbia's, after hearing what hon. members have said, that British Columbia has done such great things for worker health and safety, I'm somewhat puzzled, because it would seem to me we have fewer accidents. One could only conclude from that that the economic activity in Alberta has to be a great deal less than in British Columbia, and I don't think that's factual. As a matter of fact, I'm quite confident that it's not factual.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very impressed with the fact that the member has brought this before the House. However, due to the fact that there have not been any costs spelled out, other than the inference by the Member for Calgary-North West that there would be the saving of money – I've yet to ever see any government activity that saved money in terms of overregulation or additional regulation. I'm somewhat puzzled by this statement because the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods didn't make that statement, and he's the author of this resolution.

I look at the motion before us: “and to permit workers the opportunity to refuse to do any unsafe work without . . . prejudice or penalty.” My understanding, Mr. Speaker, is that at the moment in Alberta it's indeed an offence for a worker to work at an unsafe worksite. In other words, if the worker, which confuses me in this resolution, is actually at work and the area is unsafe, the worker can be charged. So I'm very puzzled by the latter part of the motion that says, “to permit workers . . . to refuse to do any unsafe work without suffering prejudice or penalty.” I understand that now, as I say, it's against the law if they do do any work.

So, Mr. Speaker, it just seems to me that although the intent of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is undoubtedly altruistic and well meaning, I think there are far too many questions unanswered in order for me to make the judgment in terms of supporting the motion at this time. I would urge the hon. member that if upon reading *Hansard* he finds he's in a position to answer these questions, then next time this Motion 232 comes before the House, my view in terms of support may be somewhat different.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, and looking forward to a very important element on mental health that may come forward today, I would honourably beg leave to adjourn debate.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Lethbridge-West has moved that debate on Motion 232 be adjourned. All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The motion carries.

Mental Health Care

233. Moved by Ms Barrett:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to transform the mental health system from one

which relies heavily on institutional care to one rooted in community by completing a comprehensive system of effective community-based mental health services which take into account the full spectrum of needs of people who suffer from mental illness and their families and including provision of appropriate mental health intervention and emergency services, greater use of psychiatric units of regional and general hospitals, proper co-ordination of services at the local level, and provision of adequate income and housing options for people who suffer from mental illness.

4:40

MS BARRETT: Thank you very much. [some applause] Jeez, you announce you're not running again and suddenly you get popular around here.

Mr. Speaker, this motion addresses probably what I would call the silent part of health care. Maybe I'll deal with the latter part first.

Maybe people will start to understand how complicated this issue is but how with development of a plan we can address the problems that go with mental illness. The riding of Edmonton-Highlands, which I've had the honour to represent for the last seven years, contains what's called Boyle Street, 96th Street, essentially the core of the inner city. Now, people often, but wrongly, think of Boyle Street as just, quote, skid row, close quotes, filled with alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes, thieves, and sometimes murderers. They'd be wrong if they assumed that that's the majority of the people on 96th Street. The majority of people in the Boyle Street area are very poor. Although I can't tell you exact numbers because no data exists on this, an incredible number of them are former clients of mental health institutions.

What has happened – and this started in the Lougheed years. It would have started in '83. Yeah, the election was in '82, so it was in '83. The Lougheed government – at that time I think it was Dave Russell who was health minister – started a program called deinstitutionalization. The idea was to get people who suffer from mental health disorders out into the community. It sounded real good; it sounded real slick. The real result was that people started getting busted out of the institutions and dropped in an area where they might be able to find cheap housing, and that happened to be in the core of the inner city. These people were left without life skills training, although they did get some at the hospitals, including Alberta Hospital. I don't think the people there understood the circumstances under which these people were going to be dumped, the community into which they were going to be dumped, so the training that they received was inappropriate. So these people went and filled up the inner-city tenements. They're living on welfare, to which they're entitled. They're not considered employable; they've got long-term mental disabilities. So they go and live in poverty in a community that is also, shall we say, culturally rather rough. These people didn't deserve that treatment.

The worst part is that while Lougheed refused to acknowledge that we were into a recession in 1981, I sure did. I campaigned really hard, not on my own behalf but on behalf of another New Democrat candidate, saying, “Cuts are coming, and they're going to be bad.” Sure enough, the cuts did come, along with the deinstitutionalization, the result of which was that these people got dumped without adequate skills to live properly within the inner city, and they had to survive without the comfort that goes with a properly planned mental health system. Very few group homes were developed because money was starting to get tight. Very few systems were in place. In fact, if it wasn't for some of the inner-

city agencies, a lot more of these people would be dead now than are, although too many of them are dead, Mr. Speaker.

When I started to get pumped up about running in 1984 to seek the seat of Edmonton-Highlands, I became acutely aware of the problems of the people who had been, quote, deinstitutionalized. I use the quote because it sounds so inhuman. That got me interested in mental health in a general way. After I got elected, I started dealing with constituents who would phone me in an emergency saying, "I can't get into a psychiatric bed; I'm suicidal," or what have you. "Can you help me?" I'd do what I could to help them, and I still do that.

Over the seven years, I've come to realize that all 83 MLAs could be taking this project on and it still isn't going to address the problem. What we need is a series of walk-in mental health clinics. They can be cost-efficient if they are placed in the context of walk-in health centres. Too many people use the emergency services of a hospital because there is no alternative. Right now the only alternative is something like the Boyle McCauley health centre. If you break a finger, you can go to the centre and have it reset. If you need some stitches, you can go to the centre and have it done. You don't need to be in a big queue in an emergency ward of an acute care hospital. That costs an awful lot of money because those hospitals have to have all of the latest technology and they have to have standing trauma teams on staff at all times to be prepared for disasters. The equipment, the value, the dedication, and the experience of those staff should not be deployed for minor surgical matters, but they are because we don't have community health centres.

If we can have community health centres, we can also have community health centres, walk-in clinics, for mental health. What you do is have them with salaried staff instead of fee-for-service billing by psychiatrists. There are lots of psychologists who are perfectly competent. They would be able to provide the service at the walk-in clinic. Right now psychologists are out of scope for billing within the Alberta health care insurance system. I think we should employ these people directly so that they're available for emergency care work when it happens, and if it's not emergency care, they can be doing counseling with other clients. It doesn't mean they would only be there for emergency walk-in care, but it's very important to have them there for that purpose. If they're in the middle of counseling and an emergency case comes in, you can always put the counseling on hold and deal with the emergency.

We can't do that in our acute care hospitals, no matter how hard we try. There isn't enough money, quite frankly. We'd have to have a lot more psychiatrists; psychiatrists are very expensive. We'd have to have a lot more staff and we'd have to have a lot more backup in an acute care centre, which really isn't designed to accommodate this. Acute care centres are designed to accommodate those who require hospitalization while their mental illness is being treated. There are a lot of cases that don't require hospitalization but they do need emergency service.

I would like to make the case that we can save money in our health care system. Well, I know we can. We could save 10 percent of our health care costs if we would move to a much more comprehensive regionally organized and strategized health care system. That is what the Hyndman commission recommended. We had two years of Hyndman commission study, spent a lot of moola - I'm not going to complain about the money - but then we had two years while the government decided how it was going to respond. The former health care minister's response was to me very disappointing. I went out to the meeting of the Alberta Healthcare Association that day at the Convention Centre. I listened to her response, and not once did she talk about the need

for regionalization of service delivery. What a shame. It is the single greatest factor for enjoying cost savings and enhancing health care service delivery to Albertans. There's no reason to back off it, no reason to be shy. Yes, you've got a lot of boards and municipalities that say: "No, no, no. Don't encroach on my territory." You say: "Listen, if you can't come up with a better plan, I'm going to put you in a room and you're going to devise a way for regionalization. We have to do it." We have to do it with sensitivity to local needs, because with each health care region we have to accommodate the needs of the population, and those demographics are going to change.

In some regions there's a much greater need for long-term care than there is for acute care. If that's the case, those regional boards just get together and say, "Here are my numbers versus your numbers; let's plan on the following projections," and they get down to doing it. I understand that's not being done in Lethbridge, and I'm sorry about that. I don't see how we can afford to spend another \$52 million on an additional acute care facility or combined acute care and long-term care facility when we've already got beds vacant in the extant acute care facility. I don't see how we can afford that anymore.

4:50

To return to the people who need health care services, Mr. Speaker, I don't see how it is that we can tell them, "Sorry; you have to wait two weeks for your emergency." I don't see why it is that we have to tell them, "You can't go and see a psychologist instead of a psychiatrist." The psychiatrists' backlogs are pretty serious. We need to treat health care professionals as partners. In some cases it could be a nurse or a nursing aide who can be of assistance in a crisis. Maybe you have to go further up the ladder, but until we have the political will to change our focus in health care, this won't happen.

Let me tell you the consequences of that, Mr. Speaker. I believe some people know that with every single percentage increase in the rate of unemployment, the rate of mental health institutionalization increases 3 percent. That says nothing of the rate of growth in mental health problems. They are significant. I remind my hon. colleagues here that our current rate of unemployment is 12 percent. That is serious, and what that means is that there is a lot of mental illness happening that we don't even know about, that the statistics don't show. The only way we know is to look at the backlog of client meetings by psychiatrists. We know that those are significant, but they don't have time to sit around and collect numbers; they've got patients to deal with.

If we start co-ordinating our services, including our network of home care services, we can save the system a lot of money and look after people. I've had to deal with local home care, which is funded by the province but administered locally. Sometimes I'll be told, "Well, that particular client in fact only needs an hour a day of company because she or he is mentally disturbed." Well, I say it's a lot cheaper to send out somebody to provide that company for one hour a day or two hours a week than it is to let their problems grow to the point where they're in a hospital consuming thousands of dollars per day of services. I'm not arguing that home care should be abused. I don't think that, but when I talk to the workers, they say, "Pam, we're so backlogged that we have to make decisions." I say, "I understand you've got to make decisions," but if the person can demonstrate a reasonable physical requirement and if the accompanying factor of mental health illness can be soothed by the presence of a home care worker one or two hours a week, I say that's more efficient than letting it grow to a crisis that results in that person either spending a lot of time on a very expensive couch with a psychiatrist or a lot

of time in a mental health institution. I don't believe in institutionalization. I believe in appropriate handling and care of people who have health care needs.

I'd like to be able to brag that I can do as well as the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who's known as the four-minute speaker, but I couldn't in this case, Mr. Speaker. That's because I think the subject needs to be talked about in a full fashion. I will conclude momentarily, but in doing so, I want to make the pitch to every member of this Assembly that mental health illnesses are more abundant, more common than most of you know. Some of your constituents may not even feel competent or comfortable letting you know that they've got problems. I'm pleased to say that for the last seven years I've not been known as Pam Barrett in my riding; I've been known as Pam. I think that's very important. Everybody calls me Pam, and the result of that is that people who have health care crises, including mental health crises, feel comfortable in phoning me and asking me for my help. I'm always pleased to do that.

In closing, let me remind you, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the Assembly that this issue is not going to go away. I called it the silent health care issue in my opening comments. It's about to become a very volatile issue in health care. It's up to the members of this Assembly to decide that we are going to address it in a way that provides solutions and not continued barriers. I encourage your support for this motion.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this motion made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, and I thank her for bringing it forward.

I'm not sure it is silent, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, this is the kind of situation where the pain is demonstrable and the cost is immense. The cost in human agony is immense and in family breakup and relationships and workplace relationships is immense. The cost to the taxpayer is immense.

Mr. Speaker, I support the motion. I assume that the mover would include in the motion the ideas of not just income and housing but also training, retraining, employment, recreation, social activities, and a number of others. I'm assuming that those would be rolled into her motion as well.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize the member's eloquence in speaking about those in her own constituency that she serves, and I, too, acknowledge that perhaps in the inner cities in our province some of these problems are more visible. But let me tell you, it is certainly not restricted in any way to the inner cities of our province.

MS BARRETT: I agree absolutely. That is my experience.

MRS. HEWES: It is epidemic, and the misery is everywhere. The visibility may be greater in certain parts where there are high-risk groups, but the misery and the human cost are epidemic.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of principles that should guide us here. The member has spoken to some of them. I believe it's worth while repeating them. One is the importance of early intervention, the promotion of healthy workplaces and healthy communities, the continuity of care of those who have fallen ill, the importance of regionalization of our system, and the importance of local involvement. Those are the principles that guide me as I work through in my own mind what we need to do to create a system that truly serves our total health care, not just physical well-being and physical health care.

We've been advocating for years, Mr. Speaker, the need for greater emphasis on community mental health services that include health promotion and well-being rather than the current illness model that we are still so entrapped in.

Mr. Speaker, I also assume that in moving this the member would want to roll in children's mental health, which is simply missing in so much of what our health care system provides at present. This is an immense neglect that becomes more and more visible every day. I have asked questions in this House about certain mental health treatment centres for children. I recognize that as we have integrated schools, behaviour problems in schools are causing increasing difficulties for teachers, parents, and students alike, and we are not providing the resources to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, mental health in the workplace: there's excellent documentation. I'm reminded of the earlier motion that we dealt with this afternoon. Tremendous documentation now relates to how we can create mentally healthy workplaces, and I believe we should put a great deal more emphasis on that.

5:00

I was involved in this field of practice for a good many years and did go through the difficulties of the early '70s, when we had many people confined in our institutions. At that point in time there was a tremendous amount of social action to change those circumstances. Premier Lougheed was not the Premier to begin with, but he made the circumstances of the mentally ill in our province one of his election platforms, to his great credit, and was determined to change their circumstances and the treatment that was available to them and the attitude and the acculturation of the people of Alberta of that day towards mental illness. While I believe all of those ideas were there and the intentions were there and many, many people were in fact discharged from our institutions at that point in time, Mr. Speaker, we never did follow through with the community services that were so desperately needed to maintain them and sustain them out of the institution. For me this is *déjà vu* or, as Sheldon Chumir would say, *'vujà dé.'* We are going around the same thing again. We are experiencing many of the same circumstances and problems now that this province experienced in the '70s and attempted to deal with then.

The stress of our daily life, the economic circumstances in the province, unemployment, and discomforts under employment have led to an increase in the incidence of people suffering from mental and psychological disorders. These impair their ability to have healthy family and workplace relationships and often, in fact, keep them away from work entirely. The evidence, Mr. Speaker, is seen in the increase in family breakup, in family violence, in crime, in absenteeism, in alcoholism, and substance abuse.

In spite of all the evidence, Mr. Speaker, the government has yet, in 20 years, to develop a comprehensive, responsible program of service delivery in our communities. Community support services to keep people healthy and at home are not given and have not been given the needed emphasis or resources. There's also, in my view, a lack of co-ordination within the network of treatment and care services required for the mentally ill and those who have been ill. All of it results in a person deteriorating in isolated circumstances in our communities and eventually requiring hospitalization or rehospitalization.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize some of the important steps that have been taken where regional hospitals have been designated to take patients, and I think this conforms with my notion of regionalizing and continuity of care. I think this has improved the circumstances, but we have not gone far enough. Our community support services are underfunded, and they are too few in numbers.

In addition, it's not well recognized that the range of social services that are delivered through our community supports are vital and integral parts of the psychiatric process and the psychiatric treatment. When any of these support services are lacking, there is a sharp reoccurrence in illness and recidivism.

Mr. Speaker, we have been blessed in those 20 years with tremendous improvements in technology of treatment, in chemicals and medications that can assist people immensely in keeping them in the real world and keeping them within their family context and their workplace. At the same time, I believe our understanding of mental illness and our awareness and insight have developed considerably, but the stigma still maintains. We have moved, but we have not moved far enough, in my view.

Mr. Speaker, the high readmission rates I think are due in large part to the difficulties in co-ordinating and linking with local services and the lack of continuity of care throughout our province. The problems are compounded by the acute shortage of psychiatrists, especially in isolated and rural communities, and for those trained professionals who specialize in child and adolescent mental health. Within our native communities, where unemployment is a continuing problem, mental health programs and workers are urgently required. We hear attestations to this every day. Our position is that we recognize that the majority of mental health funding has been directed towards institutional treatment, and that's important. It's an important component of the whole spectrum of treatment that is required, but it has meant that very little support is given to prevention and promotion.

Just this morning, Mr. Speaker, I spent an hour and a half or two hours at the Alberta Hospital Edmonton. This institution has tried desperately to provide services in the community and does provide outreach services, but they're not funded for this kind of outreach in the way that I believe they can and should be.

Now, I'm interested, Mr. Speaker, in the Ponoka experiment, and I think this will give us some valuable information and research as to how we can further develop a co-ordinated and comprehensive program. My criticism of the Ponoka arrangements and of the thinking that currently goes on is that we are still contemplating an institutional centred model. My preference would be for a model that's community centred of which the institution is a part. That's the opposite of an institutional model of which the community is a part. I think we need to begin looking at this whole situation the other way around. I find that as I talk with the institutions involved in mental health care, they too believe in exactly this same approach to services in our communities.

In service delivery, Mr. Speaker, our objectives must clearly be early intervention and continuity. We believe that delivery of services should be considered within a health care framework and local community input established with designated hospitals for voluntary and involuntary patients throughout the province for acute care.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to note that in long-term care we've got some very important and good things happening where our institutions are providing support to nursing homes to maintain patients who have a problem with behaviour to sustain them over a short term rather than institutionalize them further.

We also support a revamping of the advocacy role in mental health – the mental health advocate, that is – that would extend the mandate of that advocate to include all patients, particularly for a period of time following discharge and the patient's return to the community. This is something that I would hope the minister and the department would look carefully at. I believe this extension would benefit many individuals.

Continuity of care I have spoken to, Mr. Speaker. Patients and potential patients must be linked to the knowledgeable clinical

teams from community to hospital and back to the community, the team remaining as constant as possible throughout the patient's illness, recovery, and rehabilitation.

Mr. Speaker, we desperately need a 24-hour emergency crisis unit in our major urban centres. The general emergency departments make every attempt but are really not well equipped to treat the complex problems of mentally ill patients. We have all too frequently complaints or concerns expressed to us that people have tried to admit themselves to an acute care hospital in a suicidal or a desperation mode only to be told there is no bed and to be sent home. It's tragic when those kinds of things happen, and our acute care hospitals really are helpless within that circumstance. I believe a service can and should be developed that includes an awareness of the range of resources available, with trained staff available to deal with patients directly and not simply refer them.

5:10

I am committed to the notion of community clinics. The Boyle McCauley clinic in Edmonton, the Alexandra clinic in Calgary have served us very well in this regard as have many, many other private, nonprofit community organizations, but they simply don't have the resources to do all that is required of them. Mr. Speaker, despite the government's support for community mental health initiatives which they speak about, the government has not as yet established a 24-hour crisis unit, nor have they, in my view, done anything to address the serious shortage of children's mental health services.

There are many models across this nation and throughout this continent that we might well look at. The Dane county model is the one most frequently mentioned. We are not flying blind here, Mr. Speaker. There are patterns that have been established that are entirely workable and have had great success. I would encourage the government to look at them very carefully. What we need is a collaborative model: a community board with the hospital as a component and other community services as components providing some sort of pattern that works in collaboration with private, nonprofit organizations, with our community organizations that are already in the field.

I think we need to develop a much closer working relationship between the provincial mental health services and institutional care. We need to direct health care funds into more community-based, primary-level services, especially those that stress health promotion and wellness. Mr. Speaker, I beg that we become more creative in reaching high-risk groups. Many of the poor – natives, seniors – don't have life-styles that are aimed at wellness. Informal public health clinics can provide a rational and systemic approach to mental health care delivery for them.

I think we need to make a strong commitment to end professional turf wars and institutional turf wars that are crippling us in dealing with collaborative models in our communities. We need to create local health clinics whenever the demand is recognized, especially in rural areas and isolated communities, either as permanent facilities or as mobile clinical teams. I think we should certainly implement the recent recommendations from the family and community support services review which calls for a far greater collaboration between health care and FCSS: an excellent model, one that we should copy in health care as well.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure ongoing cost effectiveness in the rationale for health promotion and prevention, Liberals would establish a mechanism for an ongoing review and research to determine the efficacy of these preventive health initiatives. Unfortunately, we seldom have sufficient resources to do the necessary research to determine what the outcomes are and to

measure what programs are working and what programs should simply be dropped because they are not effective.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the success of our initiative depends upon close collaboration and consultation with health care professionals and consumers, and I think it's those groups that should guide our policies. I believe if we want to, we can develop the vision and the political will that are necessary to ensure programs of prevention and promotion and that they become an integral component of our health care system and not a discretionary part. Mental health is a very important and achievable element in our lives and in our communities. Mental illness and its care and treatment has become epidemic and needs our immediate attention.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to get up and speak on this motion. Certainly the aims and the intention of this motion are worth a lot of consideration. There's possibly no group in this province who need our support and care as much as the people suffering from mental illness. I'm sure that when the Member for Edmonton-Highlands had this motion in mind, she certainly was thinking about those people. Motion 233, though, does argue that the Assembly urge the government to conduct a complete review and transform our mental health care system to one rooted in community care. Intervention and emergency services are to be stepped up, and both regional and general hospitals are to be utilized more. Services are also to be co-ordinated at the local level.

Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to understand this motion, as that is exactly what our government is doing. The document Future Directions for Mental Health Services in Alberta has made those recommendations, and we are already putting many of those recommendations into place. I think this is probably an excellent motion, but it's likely two or three years too late. A tremendous amount of work has gone into planning this direction, and the future directions report is the product of a long consultation with Albertans and mental health stakeholders across the province. Motion 233 is in agreement with what Albertans have been saying and with the way that the mental health system in this province is being reformed.

The process leading to the future directions paper began in 1988 with the release of the discussion paper Mental Health Services in Alberta. This document was intended to provoke discussion about the direction that mental health care should take. A number of Albertans wrote in to comment on the discussion paper and offer recommendations and advice, and these recommendations helped to form the future directions paper. Certainly there was a variety of reports that had valuable input into this, such as The Rainbow Report that was mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, the action of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Agenda for Action from the Advisory Committee on the Utilization of Medical Services was also part of the offered input into that report.

Everyone involved agreed that the main goal of the mental health services must be that there be a greater involvement at the community level. Mental health services have come a long way in the past years from an emphasis on institutional care towards services based in the community. We are beginning to learn that the best thing that can be done for these people that are suffering from mental illness is to try and instill in them a sense of control and independence. If people have that control over their own

lives, that alone can give them the motivation to overcome many of their mental problems that they are facing.

It's not just the sense of control that is a healing factor. Keeping people in familiar surroundings where they are comfortable and can be around their family and loved ones will also help them recoup an awful lot faster. In recognition of this, Alberta Health agreed to give a priority to community and ambulatory care services that could help keep people suffering from mental illness in their homes and communities during recuperation. This care would be maintained along high standards of quality and would take into account the particular needs of the clients and their families.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, when we say that we've gone a long way in the past years, I guess I can almost remember back when we went the full circle. Certainly if you go back before the institutionalization took place, many of us older folks can remember when many of our mentally handicapped patients stayed in our own communities. They were cared for by the communities themselves, by their families themselves. Many of these people had part-time jobs. They were jobs that neighbours and friends gave them and took care of them. I believe that it would be a great thing for us to have those patients come back into the communities. Although the patients are certainly a different level and a different type of patient now than they were 30 or 40 years ago, there is an awful lot of merit yet in putting them back in their own communities and with their own families. I believe that institutionalizing a certain level of patient was certainly a mistake that they made a number of years ago.

I would also like to say that in putting our patients back into the communities, we do have an obligation to society to categorize these patients into levels. Dangerous patients and patients that have to have that specialized care: it isn't realistic to put them back into the communities. I know that it's going to be a very difficult job for whoever is doing it to properly place our patients. I don't think anyone should undermine or underscore the sincerity that has to be put into that. We get a lot. I'm sure every one of us can think of people that were mentally disturbed that became very dangerous to society. Sometimes catastrophes happen from that. Especially when people have known for many, many months that something was going to break loose: I think that is one of the responsibilities that is going to have to be looked at very, very carefully, at who is doing this.

I mentioned that we are already in the process of community basing our patients. We have already had a major advance involving communities and their role in the Mental Health Act. On April 1 our Minister of Health announced a two-year pilot project with a new model for delivery of mental health services in Alberta. It is designed to change the roles of mental health clients, communities, and Alberta Hospital Ponoka in the health system. Under the new program, responsibility for the community mental health clinics in four communities shifted to Alberta Hospital Ponoka. The four communities involved in the pilot project are Rocky Mountain House, Stettler, Wetaskiwin, and then Wainwright in my constituency. The mental health services in each location are to remain intact. Each community has a mental health clinic which provides assessment, treatment, and follow-up services to individuals and to families who are experiencing emotional or behavioral difficulties. These clinics together see more than 3,400 clients per year.

It was very interesting when we were working with our sexual abuse society in Wainwright and trying to get some specialized help to come down and work with some of those patients. With

community basing of our services here, there was provision in there to help some of those patients. The Alberta Health staff at the mental health clinics in each centre are being seconded to Alberta Hospital Ponoka, while hospital staff will be assigned to each community. In this way resources will be reallocated to enhance community services. In addition, closer linkages will result between the combination of hospital and community clinics.

One of the best features of this pilot project is its flexibility. It will enable each community to introduce new services or tailor its existing services to accommodate the specific needs of its clients. Each community has its own particular needs and goals. This program will allow each of them to be addressed in an individual fashion. It proposes using existing resources in a new way. Funding currently in place is being redirected in community mental health programs in their four centres. This shows that better use of resources rather than more funding is the answer to providing better mental health services.

I must say that this is certainly an area where it has to be scrutinized very carefully, because I think many of us could see the possibilities of our services expanding to the point that we could no longer afford them. I would ask the minister to do a lot of careful scrutinizing of all of our areas as we go through this pilot project, because we are going to develop more staff, and we are going to have to do a better job of putting our services together rather than putting more money at the individual ones.

This project will give us the opportunity to take a close look at how offering community mental health services from a hospital base works. The result from the evaluation of how this project works will be a great source of information for planning mental health services in the coming years. I'm sure that mental health stakeholders across the province are watching to see how this innovative program works out.

The Alberta government has also made a commitment to increase the numbers of community-based mental health services around the province and the range of services they offer. Professionals and the public are increasingly being encouraged to use community services as an alternate to hospitalization. These include family and home support services, emergency and crisis

intervention centres, community residential services, and school based programs. Supporting employment in the work force in the form of sheltered employment and vocational rehabilitation is also seeing increased support.

MR. FOX: He's reading his speech.

MR. FISCHER: Treating people on a community basis and getting them involved in the work force can be more valuable than the treatment in any institution. [interjections]

AN HON. MEMBER: It's about time to shut it down.

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, in view of the noise and the hour, I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright has moved that the debate be adjourned. All those in favour, say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that when we reconvene at 8 this evening, we do so as Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 57.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Having heard the motion of the Deputy Government House Leader, all those in favour, say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]