

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 4, 1993**

2:30 p.m.

Date: 93/05/04

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 66

Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Amendment Act, 1993 (No. 2)

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 66, the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Amendment Act, 1993 (No. 2). This being a money Bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this Bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, as promised, the Act scraps the MLA pension plan as of the day of the next provincial election. This is truly the end of the MLA pension plan; it will not be replaced. MLAs first elected in 1989 will have the contributions they made to the plan returned to them. MLAs retiring will have their pension benefits reduced retroactive to 1989. MLAs elected prior to 1989 and running in the next election also will have their benefits reduced from 4 percent to 3 percent retroactive to 1989. This Bill will eliminate double-dipping. MLAs who take an early pension will have their benefits reduced by 3 percent for every year they fall short of being eligible for a full pension, and anyone who had applied for and received pension benefits between now and 1989 will have to return moneys to the government of the province of Alberta.

[Leave granted; Bill 66 read a first time]

Bill 345

County Amendment Act, 1993

MR. GESELL: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a Bill being Bill 345, the County Amendment Act, 1993.

Mr. Speaker, this is enabling proposed law. It offers the option to a county to elect their reeve at large. Also, it offers the option to a county to elect public trustees separately and independent of municipal councillors.

[Leave granted; Bill 345 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Environmental Protection, followed by the Minister of Justice.

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to file two annual reports. The first is the Canada/Alberta flood damage reduction program annual report for 1991-92, and the second is the northern river basins study annual report for 1991-92.

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Legislative Assembly today four copies of the Attorney General annual report for the year 1991-92.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to file two annual reports: the annual report for the Banff Centre for Continuing Education for the year 1991-92 and the annual report for Lethbridge Community College for the year 1991-92.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to file with the Assembly four copies of a ministerial authorization and covering memo.

MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to section 27(1) of the Ombudsman Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly the 26th report of the Alberta Ombudsman. This report covers the activities of the office of the Ombudsman for the calendar year 1992.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and to Members of the Legislative Assembly two special guests seated in your gallery. They are our Ombudsman, Harley Johnson, and his assistant, Dixie Watson. I would ask if they would please rise and have the Assembly give them the normal warm welcome.

MR. SPEAKER: Innisfail.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature 41 grade 6 students from the Innisfail John Wilson elementary school. They're accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Layden and Mr. Lynn and parents Mrs. Saar, Mrs. King, and Mrs. Thomson. They're in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. ZARUSKY: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure today for me to introduce to you and to the Assembly 20 students and visitors from the Waskatenau school in the heart of the Redwater-Andrew constituency. They're visiting here and enjoying the tour of the Legislature. They're accompanied by teachers Mr. Boyko and Mrs. Scott and parents Mr. Braun and Mrs. Wanechko. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Labour.

MR. DAY: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui nous avons avec nous plus de soixante étudiants de l'école Oriole Park de Red Deer. I'm happy to report, Mr. Speaker, that this grade 6 group represents the first group that has moved right through the French immersion program from grade 1. We're delighted to have them with us here today with their principal, Don Falk, Mr. Larry Pimm, Mrs. Sharon Edlund, Mrs. Louise St-Denis, Mrs. Melinda Setters, and Mr. Mandaliti, the bus driver. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

2:40 MLA Pensions

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, things are getting so bad for the Conservatives over there that they've taken now to buying ads in the papers. It says: "Premier Klein on Pensions. We listened." [interjections] Did you notice that the Premier had to start his own thumping there to get them going?

Mr. Speaker, if they listened, I would say that they have very selective hearing, because the people that they listened to were the Getty gang who wanted to keep their huge pensions. That's who they listened to. Now, that's why he's pretending in this ad to have made significant cuts. As we found out yesterday, they're only very cosmetic cuts. My question to the Premier, who talks about listening: will the Premier really listen to ordinary Albertans and cut back the pensions of MLAs to fair and reasonable levels?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition obviously heard the hon. Deputy Premier table Bill 66 today, and I guess contained in that Bill are a number of facts. Facts are a stubborn thing. The facts are that MLAs elected before 1989 have had their pensions reduced retroactively. That's a fact. The MLA pension plan will be scrapped entirely. That's a fact. Let the record show that the leader of the Liberal Party, in particular, wants to bring it all back, and that, too, is a fact.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, the facts are these: in the name of fair advertising, rather than pretending it was a 25 percent cut, why didn't the advertisement say to ordinary Albertans that the pre-Getty gang was averaging a 7 percent cut, not nearly 25 percent? In cases of \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000 pensions it would be a \$4,000 cut. Why not some fairness in advertising?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess you can play with the figures any way you want. A cut from 4 percent to 3 percent is a 25 percent cut. I guess if you want to add up all the sacrifices, you could come up with an average in excess of 30 percent. So it all depends on how you look at this thing. Basically the facts are these: a good many Members of the Legislative Assembly are getting absolutely nothing other than what they paid in.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I keep coming back to this Premier. The issue for Albertans is that as they face hard times, they see people walking away with \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000 pensions plus severance packages plus the same people are double-dipping. Why doesn't the Premier really listen to Albertans and cut back on these obscenities?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it very strange that this member would be talking about obscenities, because this is coming from a \$1.7 million man. If the hon. leader of the ND opposition lived to the ripe old age of 75, our calculations show he would collect something in the neighbourhood of \$1.7 million. This member is always talking about the war on poverty. Well, it appears he's winning his.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question.

MR. MARTIN: You know, he can huff and puff all he wants. We're quite prepared to share the pain on retroactivity, Mr. Speaker. We have been right from the start, unlike this Premier, who was all over the map on it.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question.

MR. MARTIN: Well, I'm coming to that, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Right now.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, this is my second main question. The former Premier was called the triple E Premier. I think now this Premier will be known as the triple D Premier: double standards, double-dipping, and double-talk. Now, I can assure the hon. Premier that being on CHQR in Calgary hasn't fooled any Albertans about what he's tried to do. Even though he tried to fool them, they're still extremely angry over these lucrative pensions. I want to just ask the Premier simply this, because he's been misleading Albertans: how can the Premier justify his double-talk on the size of these cuts to these retiring MLAs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can only reiterate the facts as they are contained in Bill 66. The biggest sacrifice of all is scrapping the pension plan, is getting rid of the pension plan. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order, Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. KLEIN: No other political jurisdictions in the country, including the NDs in Ontario and in Saskatchewan, where they're really hurting, and in British Columbia, have demonstrated the courage that this government has demonstrated, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MARTIN: I would remind this Premier that even if we don't have pensions in the future, that was not in Bill 62. He's hiding Mr. Speaker. He's diversionary. You know why? Because they're in deep political trouble. Now they're trying to look at the future when the issue is these people walking away with these lucrative pensions. That's the political issue. I want to ask the Premier simply this: how can he continue perpetuating a double standard where some people are going to walk away with \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000-plus severance packages while ordinary Albertans are hurting? How can he justify that?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there will be a number of MLAs, about 26 or 27 according to my calculations, who will be walking away with absolutely nothing other than what they have contributed themselves.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Premier that we're talking about the Getty gang that bought us NovAtel, MagCan, Myrias, and GSR. That's who we're talking about. I ask the Premier simply this: how can Albertans have confidence in this Premier and this government when they're going to allow this to happen? These people are going to walk away with a golden handshake. How can people have confidence in them?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm talking about Ralph's team here, and we're going to do the right thing – the right thing – for the future.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, every time the government gets itself into trouble, they put an ad in a newspaper. Last time when we saw the previous pension Bill, an ad went into the newspaper from the friends of the Premier. Well, he ditched that plan, and I guess he ditched those friends. Now we've got a new Bill and a new ad. The ad says that the Premier and the government are listening to people. Nothing could be further from the truth. The ad glosses over the most important issue, and that is the issue of retroactivity. The ad does not say and it should say that some 28 MLAs still walk away with huge pension benefits. The ad should

have said that those MLAs go away with \$35 million in taxpayer benefits. My first question to the Premier is this. I'd like the Premier to tell Albertans why he didn't talk about retroactivity, why he didn't deal with retroactivity in a proper way, why retroactivity is just minuscule and people in Alberta are going to get stung by these huge benefits.

MR. KLEIN: Well, the way I see it, Mr. Speaker, those who will be receiving absolutely nothing will be returning to the government literally thousands and thousands of dollars.

Aside from that, Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the Liberal Party is perfectly entitled to buy his own ad if they have the money. You know, no one's stopping the Liberal Party from taking out an ad. I can speculate as to how that ad might read: \$4,000, as the hon. leader of the Liberal Party said yesterday, is not a lot of money. Well, maybe to him it's not. It could read also: we want our pensions back. Because that's what he said. It could also read: we don't mind a sales tax. Then it would say: vote Liberal.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, in fact if the Premier wanted to pay for an ad, this is the way the ad should read . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal plan is based on the Saskatchewan RRSP model. That model would save \$29 million just for 28 MLAs. I'd like to ask the Premier why he's not prepared to accept this suggestion, a decent, reasonable plan to deal with the 28 MLAs.

2:50

MR. KLEIN: Well, I think that our plan as contained in Bill 66, Mr. Speaker, contains the ultimate sacrifice. It doesn't propose to have a plan at all.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the ads are a sham. The answers in this Assembly are a sham, and I think it's . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: Order, hon. member. Order.

MR. TAYLOR: Since when did "sham" show up in your dictionary.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Even Westlock-Sturgeon knows from his deep study of *Beauchesne* that comments on that are out of order. [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjection] Yes. Perhaps it wasn't that deep. I'm sorry.
What was the question?

MLA Pensions (continued)

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the ads are fake. The answers are fake.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. [interjections] Order. So far that's strike two. Let's hear strike three, please. What was the question, period?

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, why won't you put something in place that allows the taxpayers of Alberta to get relief, that allows

the MLAs to walk away with a reasonable pension but not the kind of ridiculous pension that they're going to walk with? Why don't you do that?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can think of no greater sacrifice than doing away with it altogether.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this member has from time to time called me a fake and a sham and a mouse and a scam. I guess it's better to be all those things than a rat like him. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

MR. SPEAKER: Order. I'm certain the Premier will, unlike some other members of the Assembly, leap to his feet and apologize and withdraw.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I offer the most sincere apology I can ever offer. Thank you.

MR. TAYLOR: Rat is still better than Mickey Mouse.

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. TAYLOR: How about Mickey Mouse?

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon, I hope that's not a self-description.
Edmonton-Parkallen.

MR. MAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Westlock-Sturgeon perhaps should turn to his seatmate and say, "Look out, Donald; duck."

Provincial Budget

MR. MAIN: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday night our Provincial Treasurer will be bringing forth a budget, and Albertans are eagerly awaiting the arrival of what I hope would be an aggressive attack on government spending. I was on the radio this morning with a number of individuals, including the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, discussing the budget, and the issue of taxes came up. I want to make sure that as Albertans eagerly await the arrival of Thursday night, we won't be finding our wallets any lighter.

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's safe to say that Premier Klein and this government have been listening to what Albertans have said, and what Albertans have said in spades is that we have to get our spending in line with our revenues and that we can't live beyond our means. Premature release of information about what's in the budget has caused premature evictions of Treasurers from previous posts, so I won't get into a lot more detail than that other than to say that we've heard the message that Albertans have said to us loud and clear.

MR. MAIN: Mr. Speaker, in terms of a supplementary question then. We continually hear some political parties in opposition describe the threat of a sales tax: it is the only way we can solve our problems. I know the Treasurer has already denied a sales tax plan. With just a day or two to go before the budget, I wonder if he would confirm again for the Assembly and for Albertans that a sales tax is not on, as suggested by some.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, a sales tax is simply not in the cards, but I must say that I can't say the same thing for the Liberal

Party. I look at Bill 326, that's before the Assembly, the Fuel Consumption Licensing Act, proposed by the Liberal Party of Alberta. They are proposing a sales tax on automobiles in this province. The bottom line is that if it looks like a sales tax, smells like a sales tax, and takes money out of folks' pockets, it's a Liberal sales tax. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View, and then quite possibly Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: If there's time, Mr. Speaker.

Mitsubishi Corporation

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, in July of 1988 the Mitsubishi Bank secretly became involved in the Conservative government's bailout of Peter Pocklington's Gainers company. Lloyds Bank wanted out of its relationship with Mr. Pocklington, so Mitsubishi arranged for a \$55 million advance to replace the Lloyds Bank loan. In turn the Alberta government gave Mitsubishi a \$55 million guarantee. A few months later a Mitsubishi led consortium called Al-Pac won the timber rights for a huge area of northeast Alberta. My question to the Premier is: why was it that within months of having Mitsubishi help out their friend Peter Pocklington, this government gave the Mitsubishi consortium the largest award of timber rights in Alberta history?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that one really relates to the other. I'll take that question under notice and discuss it with the Provincial Treasurer.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, this wasn't all of it. Not only did the Mitsubishi consortium get huge timber rights, the government helped them skirt around an environmental review process – the Premier would remember that – and gave them financing from the heritage trust fund on incredibly favourable terms. Will he explain why we can't arrive at the conclusion that this was a case of you help our friend out and we'll help you out?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I really have to set the record straight on that issue. Al-Pac was the first pulp mill that underwent an extensive environmental impact assessment. Indeed there were public hearings conducted from Edmonton all the way through the Northwest Territories involving numerous municipalities, literally hundreds of participants, and it was that review that led to the formalization of environmental impact assessment through legislation and the establishment of the Natural Resources Conservation Board. So I really feel that I must set the record straight. This project was subjected to one of the most intensive EIAs of any project in this country's history.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

Northern Lite Canola Inc.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of agriculture. The Northern Lite Canola plant, the Sexsmith plant as some call it, was taken over by the government in 1987, and using the minister's own figures, it's cost the province about \$70 million in losses in the last five, six years. Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister says that it's coming close to making some money or may even be making some money. To the minister: isn't it about time now that we turned it back to the farmers and the producers in the Peace River country and let them run it? Let free enterprise have a crack at it, and let's get out of it.

3:00

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, it is approaching time when I'm sure we will be able to sell Northern Lite Canola to the private sector. If the hon. member has a group of individuals in the Peace country that want to get involved in the bidding process, I would encourage him to encourage them to do so.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, he doesn't have to look around. There's a number of Canola farmers, admittedly voting Liberal, that would be quite willing to take it over. I think most of the producers up there would.

Isn't the only reason the minister refuses to sell it, put it on the market that the Treasurer would have to show that we've lost at least \$70 million? In other words, the only reason you're not selling it is that you don't want to show you've lost 70 million simoleons.

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what kind of research the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon does or if he even does any. I won't verify the figure of \$70 million without checking, but every dollar Northern Lite Canola has cost the Alberta taxpayers to date has been reported through public accounts: first of all, the losses ADC absorbed when they took it back from the co-operative that was running it. Any time we've picked up operating losses since we started operating was normally done with special warrants. It certainly showed up in the budget, showed up in public accounts. There's nothing to hide. [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. No further supplementary.
Redwater-Andrew.

Reforestation

MR. ZARUSKY: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Environmental Protection. The minister yesterday announced that this week is National Forest Week. Forestry is a very important industry in our province and provides a lot of jobs and a lot of opportunities. In the Redwater-Andrew constituency Smoky Lake has probably one of the largest forestry nurseries, and I'm sure many members have visited it. It's doing a great job. My question to the minister is: could the minister indicate to the House the benefits of this world-class operation for reforestation in this province?

MR. EVANS: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the Pine Ridge nursery in Smoky Lake is in fact a world-class building. We have people there who are working very hard to ensure that we can reforest to live up to our contractual obligations, to our forest management agreements through the Forests Act with respect to quotas, with respect to permits. This is an extremely important part of ensuring that we have a sustainable forest in the province of Alberta and that we have forests that will be an economic opportunity in this province as well.

MR. ZARUSKY: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary to the minister. We know that by the year 2000 we're going to need approximately a hundred million seedlings to reforest our province, and I know Pine Ridge is capable of producing about 33 million a year. My question to the minister is: where are the remainder of these trees going to come from?

MR. EVANS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there's obviously an economic opportunity for the private sector to get involved in the growth of seedlings. This is an extremely important economic

initiative for our province which is really a secondary economic initiative to the forestry operations that were announced in the late '80s and have continued through the early part of the '90s. We can do a number of things at Pine Ridge nursery, and we'll continue to do that. At the same time we're going to try to encourage our private-sector small entrepreneurs all over this province to take advantage of that economic opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Avonmore.

Advisory Council on Women's Issues

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. This minister has mused out loud about collapsing the Advisory Council on Women's Issues with other boards and commissions. Therefore she fails to understand that in instances where there is not a strong voice to advocate on behalf of women, the unique perspectives and experiences of women are lost. There is a concern that this minister may be making decisions without knowing the facts. To the minister: will she now assure women in Alberta that prior to making any changes to the advisory council, she will consult with the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee, the YWCA, and remaining members of the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, not just the members of the Alberta Federation of Women United for Families?

MRS. MIROSH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm a woman and I'm also concerned about other women, and I've been consulting with a number of women's groups all around Alberta. We all know that the time has come when we have to do more with less. I'd like to compliment the women's advisory council on the work that they have done in the past, and they are continuing to do that.

MS M. LAING: Well, Mr. Speaker, in two weeks they'll be without quorum.

The minister has suggested that violence is the most important issue facing women and that this violence is the result of alcohol and drug abuse. Therefore she has suggested collapsing the Advisory Council on Women's Issues with AADAC. Her conclusions about the relationship between alcohol abuse and addiction and violence are at odds with the experience of workers in both the fields of addictions and violence. Will the minister now assure this Assembly that she will consult with AADAC, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, and workers who treat violent offenders before she makes any decisions about amalgamating the Advisory Council on Women's Issues with AADAC?

MRS. MIROSH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where this member is getting all her information from, because I've certainly never said something about combining anybody with anybody. That's the responsibility of the Deputy Premier. What I have said, though, is that in this Department of Community Development we do have AADAC and that AADAC, along with other interdepartmental committees, is reviewing the issues of violence against women and family violence. We have a major committee and a role to play in this area and so does AADAC.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place, followed by Calgary-McKnight.

Air Quality

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent publicity about the risk of skin cancer from the thinning ozone layer has

heightened public concern about things that we put in the air, the air that we breathe. A report recently prepared by Anthony Newton, who is a professional engineer in the city of Edmonton, suggests that there is a serious risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to a lax regulatory regime governing air pollutants in the province, specifically with reference to the 186 unregulated sour gas plants in Alberta, and the fact that there's no inventory today of all of the air pollution sources in the province of Alberta. I would like to ask the Minister of Environmental Protection to explain why in the new legislation the few existing standards that we had for air pollution are now downgraded into guidelines, which Mr. Newton says is an act bordering on criminal negligence.

MR. EVANS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I actually had an opportunity to discuss Mr. Newton's report with him on a radio show not too long ago in the province of Alberta. At that time, this issue of whether we were going to be dealing with standards, whether we were going to be dealing with guidelines or what have you, was brought up, and I'm sorry that the hon. member across didn't have the opportunity to listen to that program. We will continue to have standards under the new Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act regulations. It's extremely important that we continue to have standards. We cannot just have industry being given a measure and then let them decide for themselves whether or not they wish to abide by it. We have a principle of polluter pay, and that is precisely what we're going to do when the regulations are in place.

MR. McINNIS: I think the minister skated around the subject of standards versus guidelines.

I would like to ask a supplementary question. Back in March 1990 the Premier established a clean air consultative strategy. Now, I know that it's unlike him to create a public review with no action, but when the strategy report was finally released in November of 1991, the government made a commitment to do something. My question is: in view of the fact that there were at last count at least 14 different committees and task forces still studying this report, I wonder if the minister would advise when the government is actually going to do something to clean up the air in Alberta.

3:10

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I've had an opportunity just recently to meet, along with my colleague the Minister of Energy, with the clean air strategy committee. We have something in the magnitude of 15 groups that are reporting on various issues that were identified in the initial report. We have established an executive director. We are expecting to receive a report back from those 15 committees with a priority list of issues that they can deal with in the short term and also longer term objectives and, may I say, goals that can be reached within a reasonable period of time, all within the fiscal reality of today. When we met with those task force members, I was extremely impressed by their dedication to getting a report back to us and to prioritizing the issues dealing with our air in the province so that we can continue to have the cleanest air possible.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-McKnight.

Advanced Education Access

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's recent economic strategy paper says that "individuals must embrace an attitude of lifelong learning and skills updating." Agreed.

However, there is already an accessibility crisis in our institutions of learning and training, and advanced education itself reports that we need 53,000 more spaces in the next 10 years. My question is to the minister of advanced education: how is the government going to fulfill the Premier's commitment to lifelong learning and skills training? Do you have any plans?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, certainly we have some plans. We recognize that there will be a growing enrollment of students in our province and that we will have adults coming back into the postsecondary institutions seeking upgrading and, in fact, degrees. However, the plan is that we will be working with the stakeholders to develop a plan that will work and that we'll have an alternative to the one that will be brought forward by the Liberals where you just stand back and throw money.

MRS. GAGNON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier also called for better school to work transition programs. Such a proposal from the U of C which would provide 800 needed new spaces has sat for three years now on a pile of proposals on the minister's desk. I would like to ask the minister: how can he rationalize the Premier's comments with his decision to ignore the University of Calgary's co-op programs?

MR. ADY: The co-op program that the member speaks of is a very successful program that functions at the University of Calgary. When I was in Calgary and visited the institution, I met with the students and the faculty of the co-op program and encouraged them to forward to me their latest proposals on how we might be able to rationalize the system to make it more accessible for them. I notice that the University of Calgary has seen fit in their budget to enhance some funding towards the co-op program. Certainly we recognize it as a valuable initiative for students there. As we move forward with rationalizing and restructuring the system, certainly that will be a component of it.

MR. SPEAKER: Smoky River, followed by Calgary-Forest Lawn.

Deregulation

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of finance. One of the items that Albertans have identified as being of great economic importance to all Albertans is a streamlining of government through the deregulation process. On May 6 the minister will be bringing down his budget, and he has indicated that this no doubt will affect all Albertans to some degree. Will the minister commit to streamlining and deregulation as part of his budget?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can see that the hon. member is in suspense as to what is going to be in the budget. I know the hon. Member for Vegreville is literally hanging onto his chair. I can assure the hon. member that the whole notion of streamlining government and the deregulation of government to eliminate those obstacles that get in the way of business doing the job that it does best, investing and creating jobs, is a fundamental part of government policy. The budget will reflect that. I want to point the hon. member to the Premier's document *Seizing Opportunity: Alberta's New Economic Development Strategy*, which points out on the regulatory side that a two-phase review of all regulations and legislation is under way. I think there will be additional news in that regard as well.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Further to the minister of finance: if the minister proceeds with the streamlining and deregulation, will the

minister advise if this will create a hardship to the business community in Alberta?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, that is a concern. There is no doubt that there is a concern. Regulations and rules and laws were put in place for a purpose. As long as the public interest is properly protected, then that is our fundamental first concern. Where this government can get out of the business of setting rules and being arbitrary and not allowing business to get on with what it does best, that's what we want to do. We want to get out of that business.

I can only point again to the economic development strategy, which talks about helping industry by supporting industry led economic development, not a government led, not a Legislature led, not a Liberal led economic development strategy, but an industry led economic development strategy. When I look at this document, it is the least public-sector intrusive economic development strategy I've ever read or seen in my life. I think that its focus on infrastructure development and a competitive taxation system is the right way to help business grow business in Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Forest Lawn and, if there's time, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Kerby Centre

MR. PASHAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One year ago I raised questions about the need for funding for the health centre at the Kerby Centre in Calgary. Unfortunately the funding situation has not improved since then, and the health centre will be without funds by July. A year ago the Minister of Health indicated an unwillingness to fund the centre because she had already established her priorities and it wasn't on her agenda for the year. My question is to the Minister of Health. Given that a year has passed and there's been ample opportunity to include funding for the centre in this year's budget, will the minister now indicate whether she intends to provide funding for this very valuable program or not?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly aware of the very fine and excellent programs that the Kerby Centre offers. We do fund the Kerby Centre today for a number of their initiatives in their adult day programs. The minister responsible for seniors has met with the Kerby Centre, and we have discussed their health initiatives. I would just like to let the member know that we have had three pilot projects for community wellness programs in place in the province. I am looking to the assessment of those projects to see how that might fit into the Kerby Centre's mandate.

MR. PASHAK: Mr. Speaker, the minister's department does not provide funding for this health centre at the Kerby Centre. They have to rely exclusively on gambling moneys and private donations to operate the centre. One of their casinos lost money, another provided operating funds for only seven months, and they won't get another casino until 1994. So I'd like to ask the minister responsible for seniors: does this minister consider this an adequate means for funding such a cost-effective, health promoting preventative centre? If so, will she lobby her colleague the Minister of Health to ensure that a more stable source of funding is provided to keep that health centre functioning?

3:20

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I just happened to be there yesterday and met with the seniors, and, yes, they are providing

an excellent service not only with their health, but also they have a seniors' abuse program ongoing. The Minister of Family and Social Services also will be taking part in that program, and we will continue to work together and provide what necessary facilities there are for the seniors. With regards to the health program, it is a preventative method, and the Calgary caucus and the minister responsible for seniors are working with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Family and Social Services in making sure that these programs are indeed in place.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Child Welfare

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The recent tragic reports concerning the life of an 11-year-old young offender highlight once again the failure of this government to respond to the needs of our most vulnerable children. Let's make no mistake: the child welfare system failed this youngster. Now it seems that the government is trying to sabotage the few protective services that remain in child welfare, presumably to save money or because of some least intrusive policy. My questions are to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Will the minister admit that his department has now instructed regional child welfare offices to stop taking children into care?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to indicate to the hon. member that we are a caring government, and as I've said to this House and to the hon. member before, we do have a budget of \$155 million with 1,200 staff in this department looking after that area. Under foster care we have \$39 million that we are providing for programs of this nature. Unfortunately, when we are dealing with children, as a native cabinet minister I'm not proud to say that 49 percent of those children we are dealing with are of native ancestry. The whole issue of child welfare in relation to that has a lot to do with the conditions and the poverty a lot of us continue to live in. I'd just like to indicate to this House that the national energy program, which these people supported, took \$60 billion from this province. With this population today that's \$23,218 per individual. If those dollars were here today, we could provide a lot better programs for Albertans.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, that's pathetic. [interjection] It is. Frontline workers as well as children are suffering under this government's regulations.

Yesterday the minister rattled off a list of the number of supposedly alternative spaces for adolescents at risk. If we have enough beds, I'd like to ask the minister: why is there a waiting list for kids to get into treatment at the Yellowhead centre, where he's keeping some of the cottages closed and closing more?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to again advise the hon. member that I did visit the facility yesterday and talked to the staff members, the people that were in charge, the frontline workers, and had an opportunity to visit the facility thoroughly and also had an opportunity to talk to some of the clientele in the facility. I will continue discussions. We've set up meetings to continue discussions with the group that is in charge there, that know the issues within that facility. You can be assured that we will continue providing the high quality of service that's required for those children.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Bow.

Arts Funding

MRS. B. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the hon. Minister of Community Development. Madam Minister, Calgary-Bow is a very diverse community and has a significant number of constituents who work in the arts field. I've received a number of letters from my constituents expressing their concerns about continued funding for the arts in Calgary. Could the minister explain what steps she has taken to alleviate the apprehensions of these very talented and productive individuals, the Calgary arts community?

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I met with a number of people in the arts community: the Coalition for Cultural Awareness, the Edmonton Professional Arts Council, the Calgary Professional Arts Alliance, and the Alberta Municipal Association for Culture. They are very concerned about their future. They have offered to participate in a marketing strategy with the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, and they've offered this service free. We are putting together a program so we can do some extensive marketing, so we can prepare people around Alberta and people outside of Alberta for the wonderful art and cultural facilities and talent that we have in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Calgary-Bow.

MRS. B. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary is again for the Minister of Community Development. Madam Minister, what is the impact of this marketing strategy on the future potential for employment opportunities in the arts community?

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, there are probably about 25,000 people employed in the arts community. I'd like the House to be aware that the Foundation for the Arts supports the arts community through the minister responsible for lotteries, \$16 million, and members opposite want to see those lottery dollars removed. The arts community is very dependent on these lottery dollars but are prepared to put their time in to promote the arts and culture as a major industry for Alberta and are working with us to do that.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that the written questions on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 389.

[Motion carried]

Agricultural Development Corporation

389. Mr. Taylor asked the government the following question:
How many acres of land that farmers quitclaimed to Agricultural Development Corporation or were foreclosed by Agricultural Development Corporation between January 1, 1985, and December 31, 1991, are now once again owned by that farmer or the farmer's family?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the government will accept Question 389.

head: **Motions for Returns**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 227.

[Motion carried]

BD Consulting

227. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing documents showing details of supplies and services, fixed assets, and other, including purpose of the expenditure, of the amount as reported in the supplementary information to the 1989-90 public accounts paid to BD Consulting by the Department of Agriculture.

MR. TAYLOR: Speaking to the motion, Mr. Speaker, it's really one of those motions that would be unnecessary if we had a proper right to information Act, not, if you'll pardon the expression again, the Mickey Mouse or rat thing that we have introduced here, which will actually fine people if they use information that they print or fine the MLA or fine the press if they leak information on a question involving the government or a contract with the government. In fact, we'd have the rather ridiculous setup where if that no right to information occurred, we could be fined \$5,000 for asking about Mr. Pocklington's loan for Gainers. This type of right to information we don't need.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

In this particular area I have only asked for the expenditures "showing details of supplies and services, fixed assets, and other, including purpose of the expenditure" as shown that's been paid out to BD Consulting by the department of agriculture. Now, Mr. Speaker, I've always held that any business that's done with the taxpayers and using the taxpayers' money should be available for all the taxpayers to examine. In this type of a debate I understand that I will have a chance to close it off anyhow. There's no sense in carrying a bale of hay over to the cow if she's going to be satisfied with just a forkful. So I think I'd just as soon sit down and see whether the hon. member is going to acquiesce and let the motion stand and say that he will come up with the information or whether he's going to fight it. There are a number of other questions on the Order Paper in the same area of trying to find out what kinds of contracts the government had with different firms, consulting firms and other business firms, out there that we spent taxpayers' money on. This government often thinks that somehow or another they're spending their own money or the cabinet's money rather than the taxpayers' money and therefore it's a secret. I'd be very interested in hearing what the hon. member says before I close debate.

Thank you.

3:30

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the government rejects Motion for a Return 227.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I think he said accept. It's so rare that I hear . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: He said reject.

MR. TAYLOR: Reject, was it? Would you nod your head if you rejected it? Mr. Speaker, he said that he's rejected it. This

bothers me to no end. Of course, this happens to any government. It doesn't matter whether it's Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Communist, or what. Twenty-two years in power and they get to thinking there's kind of a royal we, like Queen Victoria: we did this and we did that and we are not amused and we are not going to tell the taxpayers what we did with our money. However, the taxpayers don't think we means only the provincial cabinet. There's no reason at all why literally billions could be spent of the public's money, and then when we ask what the details of the contract are, they say: no, that's a secret. It doesn't matter that the people they've contracted with are private. If that's the case, then you would never have any information out. It should be well known by every contractor or engineering firm – and I've been in engineering and in different contracting businesses a great deal of my life – that when you deal with the government, you're dealing with a public office and therefore everything that you do and every contract you sign is public information. There should be nothing kept secret from the public unless it's in the lines of defence or national security.

Certainly BD Consulting's contract with the department of agriculture is not in the interest of national security. If it is in the case of national security, I would withdraw my motion. If you can prove, for instance, that you were dealing with radioactive cows or an atomic horse or maybe a helicopter made of goose feathers, God knows, or some other weird thing, if you can show that somehow or another it is a case of national security, then of course it becomes quite reasonable. But if all it is is the mundane spending of taxpayers' dollars – your dollar, my dollar, our neighbour's dollar – with someone for what they did, why conceal it? Why conceal it? Worst of all, Mr. Speaker, you might be doing that private individual a disservice. That private individual might be quite tickled to have it read, because when it rises in the Legislature and when it's quoted through the papers that they refused to give the contract and the details of BD Consulting, BD Consulting might be quite upset, because it starts a chain in motion that maybe something wasn't quite right, quite kosher, maybe it doesn't smell right. I'd be willing to bet all the votes that the hon. Member for Red Deer-North will get in the next election that this government did not ask BD Consulting whether they could release the information. Yet by innuendo and by being negative and by holding back, they're sitting there besmirching a firm that may have a very, very good reputation indeed.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's a very, very nasty thing they're doing indeed. Very nasty indeed. Not only are they holding back the information from the public, but they're probably blackening the name of a contractor who has never been asked whether they could keep the information quiet.

I'm just bringing in the heavy artillery, Mr. Speaker, talking about national security. It might blast them out of that thing. I see our hon. friend from Lethbridge-East in there now doing some yelling. I guess when you cut a guy's pension, you really make him noisy. The words he's mouthing to me shouldn't be in the Order Paper either. He doesn't know that I can read lips, being partly deaf.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair would ask the hon. member to speak to the motion.

MR. TAYLOR: Well, I must confess, Mr. Speaker, it was very shocking, even to my experienced ears, which have been around the world a number of times, what Lethbridge-East mouthed to me. It was very shocking indeed.

Nevertheless, back to the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. He is doing a double disservice – a double disservice – cutting off

the taxpayers from knowing where their money has gone – where their money has gone – and on top of that, Mr. Speaker, blemishing the reputation of a consulting firm that I'm sure would probably be quite willing to say what they got the money for to stop the innuendo.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Standing Orders Revision

235. Moved by Mr. Wickman:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly be changed to compel ministers to answer questions asked of them by private MLAs.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to Motion 235, which appears on the Order Paper under my name, I would like to make a few comments. I'm going to keep it relatively brief. I find that when I go out and talk to people, even in the schools when I talk to grade 6 classes, one of the things they commonly ask is: why do we watch on TV a system that sees adults behaving at times like a bunch of children, particularly on the other side? I think what it points out is that there is a need for quite a dramatic change in parliamentary procedure, in the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly, issues that have to be addressed, and I call it Mandate for Change.

Now, we've got to talk in terms of looking at and implementing the concept of all-party committees so that all of us can work very constructively to the betterment of Albertans. We have to look at the question of electing a Speaker by secret ballot within the House, which is done in the House of Commons at the present time. We have to look at a process which allows for a spirited and meaningful debate on the budget, where deputy ministers are brought forward, where they are held accountable for their budgets, where members from all parties in the Legislative Assembly are given the opportunity to participate. We have to look at a mechanism that ensures that Bills submitted by government private members, by opposition private members are taken seriously and dealt with and are not just a token that sits there on the Order Paper. The same goes for motions such as this particular motion here. If I were a betting person, I would wager that this particular motion will probably go down. It might be very close, but it'll probably go down. We have to look at freedom of information, and when I say freedom of information, I mean freedom of information that is really freedom of information, not what the Premier brought forward, that mass freedom of information Bill, but one that truly allows Albertans to seek out the information that they are entitled to. Mr. Speaker, it is very, very important that this Legislative Assembly, that this body and all parliamentary bodies deal with the concept of and implement as part of Mandate for Change the free vote. Free votes allow members to speak and act on behalf of their constituents who placed them in this position of trust and responsibility.

Now, the portion of Mandate for Change that we're addressing today deals with the question of ministers answering questions during question period. Very, very often, Mr. Speaker, members of the opposition will ask very, very meaningful questions, and on occasion ministers will get up, choose not to answer those questions and simply divert those questions, taking them under

advisement or just fluffing around. Standing Orders must make it very, very clear that when questions are asked by members of the opposition, the ministers must take them seriously and they must feel compelled to answer those questions. The same goes for the questions that we dealt with earlier on the Order Paper. For example, the one today was accepted; another one was rejected. There is a responsibility on the part of ministers that represent or are part of the Executive Council to respond. The same goes for government private members that ask questions as well. Mind you, those tend to be puffballs, where ministers will get up and read a prepared statement, so they're not in the same category.

3:40

The point that I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker, and it's part of the parliamentary process that makes it very, very meaningful: when members get up and ask questions of the Premier and ask questions of the various ministers – whether it be on NovAtel, whether it be on Gainers, whether it be on that \$25 billion debt, or whether it be on this so-called pension reform, these so-called retroactive pensions – those ministers must get up and reply and they must get up and reply in good faith, not just some fluff and flip-flop, fly-type attitude, which we see more and more coming, particularly in this Legislative Assembly, which is now led, of course, by a new Premier.

On that particular note, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to conclude to allow other Members of the Legislative Assembly to respond. I would hope that a government member will respond and say: "Yes, we can accept this. We will accept this."

Thank you.

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

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I looked at Motion 235, I thought for a moment that I might be able to support it, but then as I looked at it a little more closely, I came to realize that there are certain issues that the government must hold back on providing information. For example, if I were to come forward and ask a question to the Minister of Labour specifically about a case on a workers' compensation matter, if the Minister of Labour were to bring that case into the Legislature, he would be in trouble if he were to divulge information to me as the Labour critic and the critic for the Workers' Compensation Board. The Minister of Labour would end up being in trouble if he were to divulge that information to all of the Legislative Assembly because those individual files are confidential and they ought not to be brought to the Legislative Assembly for all of Alberta to hear. The same thing with social services. Those cases, too, are confidential between the client and the social worker. There are cases, quite frankly, that I think the government ought to provide more information on, questions of loans that have long since expired, where there's not going to be any problem if the government were to disclose certain bits of information about loans or portfolios that the government holds. Perhaps those files ought to be more accessible to the opposition, but I believe that we can do that through a freedom of information Act rather than to change the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly to compel ministers to provide certain information.

I think it's also important to note that if the Liberal Party wants to ensure that there's some responsibility for a minister to respond to a particular question, if they want to make that position, then they ought to also make that position consistent for all members of the Legislature, and that's certainly not the case. There are times when the Liberal members will stand up and espouse one

thing and then do something completely different. Mr. Speaker, what's good for the goose certainly ought to be good for the gander. I would invite members of the Legislature to take a gander at *Hansard*, by golly, Monday, April 26, number 123, on page 2413. Now, I understand that that night debate got a little hot in the Legislature. The Deputy Premier, the Member for Sherwood Park, stood up to ask the leader of the Liberal Party a question. He said:

Let me say to the hon. member that I'm more than happy to respond to him, but let me ask him whether he had advocated his member on Members' Services to raise this issue when he was suggesting that the leader of the . . . Party should receive an increase in his own salary.

That was the question that the Deputy Premier put to the leader of the Liberal Party.

The response from the leader of the Liberal Party was to not answer the question. To not answer the question. I would like to quote what the leader of the Liberal Party said in response to the question from the Deputy Premier. He says:

Mr. Speaker, we can look back at a number of issues including the matter of freedom of information, that a Premier stood in this Assembly and said we don't need such an Act because you can stand in this Assembly and get any answer you want.

Mr. Speaker, double-talk, double standard. There's a problem with that. You see, the Liberals just a few moments ago wanted to compel ministers of the Crown to respond to questions that they put, but at the same time when government members or the Official Opposition stand to ask questions of the third party, what do we get? Double-talk, doublespeak, no answer at all. What we got was goosed by the leader of the Liberal Party.

So, Mr. Speaker, all I'm looking for before I agree to support any motion coming from the Liberal Party is just some consistency. It's not here in *Hansard*, it's not here in the official records, and it's certainly not contained in the motion.

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

MR. GOGO: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would hope today with Motion 235, moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, that it doesn't become simply a bashing, anti-Liberal exercise. I think it should be reasoned. I think one should make arguments that point out, if I may, sir, the error of the hon. member's way in terms of not having looked at the system which, with respect, is somewhat historical. If one only looks at, in some people's view, the Mother of Parliaments, Westminster, one begins to get an understanding about what the hon. member is asking. I hope to advance some reasons why I have difficulty in agreeing with the hon. member's motion, because it's somewhat confusing.

First of all, and I quote: "Be it resolved that the Standing Orders," – which is the Bible of this House, supplemented by *Beauchesne*, *Erskine May*, and other authorities, but clearly the Standing Orders of this House are only amendable by members of this House, so we are supreme in that stand about making these Standing Orders applicable to us – of the Assembly of Alberta "be changed to compel," the operative word being "compel," "ministers to answer questions asked of them by private MLAs." I don't know what a private MLA is. I assume it's something other than a corporal MLA or a sergeant MLA. I think a member of this Assembly has rights that are built into the Standing Orders, and they're supported by other authorities.

I'd like to advance some arguments why I have difficulty agreeing with this hon. member's motion. First of all, he doesn't refer at all to question period. I don't know whether he specifically means question period. He's mentioned that a couple of

times. I would point out to the hon. member that there are really six opportunities for members of this House to elicit information from members of Executive Council, or those who are the only people in authority to expend public funds. Those would be the estimates, which we guarantee in our Standing Orders some 25 days, as long as anyone in the nation; public accounts, which by statute and Standing Orders meet here once a week while the House is in session; the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, which again by Standing Orders compels ministers to appear before that all-party watchdog committee and have questions put to them. Public Accounts, obviously, in keeping with a tradition established years ago, is chaired by a member of the Official Opposition. Then there's Motions for Returns, Mr. Speaker, which, if I could draw members' attention to today's Order Paper, there are a substantial number of motions for returns that are put in, and I submit that in many cases, if one listens to the answer by the government, much of that information is available through normal research. I would simply draw members' attention to *Beauchesne* 408 with regard to Oral Question Period and suggest that the hon. member read *Beauchesne*, because it's spelled out very clearly in (e) through (f) under sub (1) that they must be urgent questions. I'm finding more and more that some of those urgent questions for some reason find their way onto the Order Paper. Finally, in addition to Motions for Returns, we have the opportunity of Written Questions, where the government must respond either in the affirmative or the negative.

3:50

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that when one looks at the six opportunities that members of the House have, particularly the opposition members, to put ministers on the spot with regard to answering questions and recognizing that periodically the fourth estate in this establishment is occupied by people – they obviously are out for coffee today; it's private members' day – I think members of the House have ample opportunity to get their message across.

Mr. Speaker, Standing Orders are very clear as to what's contained within the whole ambit of putting questions. It historically has never been a requirement, nor should it be a requirement – and some of the arguments have already been put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Belmont. Where do you draw the line as to what a minister must or must not disclose? History's replete, I submit, certainly in Ontario, with many ministers of the Crown having to resign simply because, in the interests of informing opposition, they disclosed information which they should not have, perhaps under the guise that they had some more responsibility to disclose certain information. As many of us know, the net result of that was to see those ministers cease to be members of Executive Council.

As chairman of the Select Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform I am keenly interested in reform, keenly interested in access to information. That's Bill 61 on the Order Paper. The Premier himself has put forward that Bill. People, it would seem to me, are attempting to jump the gun by prejudging what the debate on Bill 61 is going to say. I think that's most unfair, Mr. Speaker. In addition, the whole question of free votes, the whole question of election of Speaker by secret ballot, reference made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, are all items that the Parliamentary Reform Committee is going to consider. We went to some expense to ask Albertans what their views are. Today I've just signed the 50th letter in response to briefs that we've received making recommendations or suggestions as to how we should change our system of parliamentary reform.

Mr. Speaker, I don't find any worthwhile argument put forward by the hon. member. I don't want to get personal, but it reflects

the ineptitude of the hon. member's party with regard to the parliamentary system. We have a system that's been around for many, many years, starting with the election, sir, of your position, not being an agent of the Crown but being elected by members who are elected to represent the people. That was started in the 13th or 14th century. I think we should be extremely careful if we're going to try and bend *Beauchesne*, which is very clear that the minister and the minister alone shall decide whether he or she will or will not answer a question. For us to attempt today to alter the rules, whereby we force a minister of the Crown to answer a question which in his or her judgment they deem inadvisable, is simply wrong. As long as we have the estimate process, the public account process, the heritage savings trust fund watchdog process, Motions for Returns, Written Questions, plus Oral Question Period, I think we have every opportunity there where the public, assuming the fourth estate does its job, can judge the performance of both the minister and the government in the context of whether or not they answer questions.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I for one certainly cannot find myself supporting the motion by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, Motion 235.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member would like to close debate? [interjections] Oh, sorry. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, I'm not out of this House yet.

I'd like to draw to the attention of the members the document that was circulated today or possibly yesterday. It was on my desk as I arrived today. It is the 1992 annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office. I'd refer the members to page 5 of that document. It's reported that during the Fourth Session of this Legislature our New Democratic Party colleagues asked 395 questions in the Assembly. Our Liberal colleagues were given by the Speaker an opportunity to ask 245 questions. Add those two figures together and we arrive at an opposition question total of 640 questions in the Fourth Session of the Legislature. I know my government colleagues would want to know how many questions from the government benches were accorded by the Speaker, and that number is a devastating total of 207. Just to put those numbers now in context, Mr. Speaker, with three-quarters of the seats in this Assembly held by government members, they were given an opportunity to raise one-third of the questions. I'd like to suggest to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud that the next time he puts together a motion of this nature perhaps he might wish to consider this very basic democratic inequity.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be useful for the members to reflect for a moment on the purpose of question period. I'd like to suggest that it's a vehicle for the opposition and government members to obtain information of an urgent nature and on occasion to attract public attention to a public issue: an issue throughout the province or, as is often the case, an issue with an individual constituency. As cynical as it sounds – and cynicism, most assuredly, is not my long suit – on the basis of 14 years in the House I would suggest that this motive, this rationale for question period is not very frequently realized.

In fact, if we were to bring in an outsider – now, the last time I referred to a Martian, I ended up in an *Edmonton Sun* story, so I won't use the Martian analogy. If we were to bring a person from another country, unfamiliar with the parliamentary process that we are privileged to live under, and ask him or her to observe question period for a few days and then ask that individual, "What would you say is the apparent purpose of question period?" Do you know what I think the response would be? "Well, first of all, I think it's an opportunity seized by the opposition to embarrass

the government. Secondly, I would suggest as a tourist just passing by that it appears that it's an opportunity for the government to defend and occasionally explain government policy and to try to deflect or even retaliate against these opposition attempts to embarrass the government."

I think that's a fairly realistic assessment of what goes on in this place between 2:30 and 3:30 weekdays, at least Monday to Thursday, and between 10 and 11 on a Friday. Therefore, I'd like to submit that Motion 235 before us today is four things: it's unrealistic, I regret it's idealistic, possibly we might even characterize it as somewhat flimsy, and it's certainly opportunistic. Other than that we like the motion.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

My colleague from Lethbridge-West – I always remember the difference, because Lethbridge-West is best and Lethbridge-East is . . . No. Lethbridge-West referred the members to *Beauchesne* 408. I'd like to do likewise, if I could, Mr. Speaker. Pages 120 and 121 of the sixth edition give – oh, I haven't counted them – a couple of dozen criteria that have guided our Speaker and other Speakers throughout the land in determining what constitutes an appropriate question. It is obviously not appropriate, Mr. Speaker, for me to review all of these.

4:00

I would like to cite one or two that I think from time to time, if not frequently, are somewhat violated. "It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion." Now, there's a joke. "A supplementary question should need no preamble." Add that to your cartoon and joke manual. "The question . . . cannot seek an opinion." Oh, have we ever heard an opinion sought in this House from the opposition side? Of course we have on many occasions. Well, enough of that, Mr. Speaker, but let me refer to item 8 in 409. "A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again." Could I refer the members to yesterday's Blues? Now, I was not present in the House, but I have read *Hansard* today, and it seems to me we've had one question asked roughly nine times with precious little imagination to disguise what was going on. In light of the experience that I have summarized and in light of current experience, it seems to me that we have underlined my earlier suggestion that the motion today is somewhat idealistic.

Now, *Beauchesne* 416(1) indicates that "a Minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for refusing." I'd like the members in the House today to pause for a moment and ask themselves: why is that notation a part of our parliamentary tradition? I've done so today, and others may bring forward a different rationale. I feel that we have that provision, that "a minister may decline to answer . . . without stating [his] reason" for so doing, because armed with the departmental and portfolio knowledge and information and experience that a particular minister has, he or she quite properly should exercise ministerial discretion, and that discretion and that personal judgment must prevail. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I believe this discretion has not been exercised unfairly by the ministers with whom I've been privileged to serve.

Mr. Speaker, if I could change gears for a moment and roll back the calendar a month to Mandate for Change. In April of this year the Liberal Party released a policy paper that carried that magnanimous title: The Alberta Liberal Plan for Legislative and Budgetary Reform. This paper interestingly enough included a section which dealt with questions asked of ministers during question period. Of course, that's the thrust of the Member for Edmonton-

Whitemud's motion today. According to this Liberal paper, ministers can avoid questions "by refusing to stand up and answer." The Liberal solution to this so-called problem was to recommend that "the Speaker use his authority . . . to encourage answers to questions." Alberta is a democracy, and my response to this Liberal paper is quite simply that Alberta is a democratic jurisdiction, and cabinet ministers quite properly are allowed to say whatever they feel is appropriate within the rules to say in the House. I'd say that whether it was a Tory administration or a Liberal administration or, heaven help us, an NDP administration. It would still be the same view.

Now, it is critical to democracy that nobody be given the power to rule whether an answer is politically correct or not. I hope this won't offend you, Mr. Speaker, but I submit that your role, sir, should not be to judge whether a minister said the right thing. I believe your role, sir, is to "preserve order and decorum" and to "decide questions of order." That, of course, is from our own Standing Orders, 13(1). It has long been accepted that if a minister refuses to answer a question in this House, that minister will have to pay a political price both inside and outside the House, and that's motivation in and of itself. All members of course realize what I'm talking about. It's the media scrumming a minister when he refuses to answer a question, and that's the price of not answering a question in the House. Allowing the Speaker to rule out of order, unacceptable, or incomplete questions sets a very dangerous precedent involving free speech in this Assembly, a precedent which can be taken to frightening extremes if some people across the way should find themselves forming a government.

Now, there's a big difference, a monumental difference between Motion 235, which calls on the Speaker to compel a minister to answer questions, and Mandate for Change, which calls on the Speaker to encourage a minister to answer questions. Compelling a minister to answer, Mr. Speaker, which the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud obviously wants, implies that the minister would be forced to give an answer which is acceptable to the Speaker. On the other hand, encouraging a minister to answer implies that the Speaker would request an answer in a more subtle or diplomatic or persuasive fashion. I firmly believe that both of these options are wrong. The fact remains that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's motion is different than the official Liberal position on the issue, and I'd leave that for him to resolve with the members of his caucus and others who claim authorship of the Mandate for Change document.

Now I would like to ask the members in the House to reflect for a moment on another consideration: the question of confidentiality or confidential information. Motion 235, I would submit, is additionally flawed in that a minister would be forced to give an answer to all questions asked in the Assembly. This could mean that a confidential matter, for example, which ministers of course are not allowed to discuss publicly, would have to be answered. That of course would be a serious breach of confidence for all Albertans.

It would not be difficult, Mr. Speaker, between us, friends, to imagine a situation – we've seen it in other Assemblies; we've seen it in the Rae administration in Ontario in recent times, and from time to time it occurs in other jurisdictions – where there has been just such a breach of confidentiality, and that is a significant breach of the entire parliamentary tradition that provides the framework, the umbrella, indeed the underlying foundation for the things that we do in this House.

Well, I feel that perhaps I've taken my fair share today in this debate. The Speaker is nodding no, so armed with that subtle direction, let me move on to yet another consideration of Motion 235. Surely I jest, Mr. Speaker.

Without meaning to demean the motion or indeed the member who sponsored it – obviously it was extremely well intentioned – could I submit, for the various reasons that I've overviewed this afternoon, that it is somewhat flawed. I do believe earnestly that it's flimsy. It's most certainly idealistic, and as a consequence I have to ask all the members here today to reject Motion 235.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, to close debate. It's nice to hear that members on the government side in fact are reading our policy documentation, because it becomes very, very important that they have an understanding of those positions that are being put forward.

I hear very, very often reference being made to parliamentary tradition. Well, maybe it's time we started to change some of the parliamentary traditions. Simply because something has been in place for a number of years or hundreds of years does not necessarily make it a good thing, does not necessarily mean to say that it's carved in stone forever and forever and forever. If one gets out there on the hustings and talks to people, you understand there's a crying demand for change. There's a crying demand from the electorate saying: "Clean that House up. Make it work better than it works at the present time." They watch on TV and they see what happens here.

The member points out the number of questions that are asked. It's not a matter of the number of questions that are asked; what's important is the number of questions that are answered. When a question has been asked nine times, obviously it hasn't been answered the first eight times and probably not the ninth time either, so it'll probably show up a 10th time.

4:10

There has been indication of change despite this so-called parliamentary tradition that supposedly prohibits some members from expanding their minds and looking at change. Free vote for example: more and more we see the parliamentary system start to look at the free vote concept. Even government members in their particular paper dealing with the Constitution dare to talk about parliamentary change in terms of free vote. So it's not like we're saying something here that is brand new, that we're going to ask for parliamentary change that is unthinkable. It may be difficult for some people to understand that there is a need to change.

Reference has been made many, many times about how this government listens. Well, if this government was listening, they would be hearing that people out there are crying for change. People are demanding change. They are demanding parliamentary reform. They are demanding a mandate for change; there is absolutely no question about that.

I would ask all members to support this very, very, very worthwhile motion.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: There is a call for the question.

[Motion lost]

MR. SPEAKER: The chair would just go further and state for the record that this is one of the very few occasions when the Chair has some regret about Standing Order 11(1).

Review of MLA Role and Responsibilities

237. Moved by Rev. Roberts:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to create an independent commission to review the role and responsibilities of MLAs and then establish

salaries, benefits, and a review mechanism commensurate with the role, such commission to have the following membership: a judge from the Court of Queen's Bench; representatives of the public including the Alberta Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Federation of Labour, associations of Alberta municipalities; and groups representing people living on fixed incomes.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre.

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to get into that last motion myself, but I do remember being taught back in '86 that there are all kinds of rules about asking questions but there aren't any rules on answering them. Members of the Liberal caucus had better get used to that.

With respect to Motion 237, Mr. Speaker, I think perhaps it couldn't come at a more timely juncture. Perhaps it's a little too late. Upon reflection, members of government and others in the House might have thought that we could have been saved a whole lot of difficulty and tension over the last while if this motion had been in place a year or so ago. Nonetheless, I think it still is very useful. We want to offer it as our position from the New Democrat caucus. As I say, it's been on the Order Paper for a couple of years now, I believe. It's been creeping its way up to the top, so finally we get a chance to discuss it briefly this afternoon.

It seems to me, after some good debate here, I would anticipate all-party support of the motion. Despite the fact, as I understand, that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud spoke against this kind of motion in Members' Services Committee, I thought I did hear just last week that his leader supported publicly this position and talked at length about setting up such an independent commission, so it's good to have the Liberal caucus finally onside and seeing the light and wisdom of this recommendation for an independent commission. Moreover – again, it's a press report – I do believe I read somewhere quite recently that the Premier himself has said: yes, it's about time we had an independent commission to review the role and responsibilities of MLAs and establish salaries and benefits and the rest. So given of course the new Premier's support of this motion and I know his willing caucus supporting him on that, we should enjoy all-party support for the motion here this afternoon, another example, it seems to me, of we New Democrats struggling away trying to bring some light to these issues and seeing them finally come to fruition.

The motion, though, setting up such a commission to independently “review the role and responsibilities of MLAs” and so on, addresses what we obviously have spent a great deal of time on personally and in our caucuses and in our public discussions with our constituents and fundamentally addresses a problem which is a very, very difficult one. That is the problem of how in any job situation there are appropriate mechanisms to basically assign worth to value, how to find the mechanisms to objectively determine the economic worth of the value of a certain person in a certain position in the work force, which is often subjectively experienced and subjectively valued but needs to be objectively determined, the economic worth of it.

Now, we have a variety of mechanisms in the marketplace to do this kind of assessment. Certainly, as I've read briefly about labour market theory, there are in fact basic principles of supply and demand at work in how you assess the salary and benefits of workers in the marketplace, because labour is seen as a kind of commodity which is either bought or sold. So we have market mechanisms which can determine the worth of certain workers, depending on the supply and demand of those workers and their skills and expertise. As we know, those market mechanisms are

often fraught with a number of other variables and other factors which enter in, which don't make the issue at all that simple. I mean, we might argue that everyone would love to be an MLA, but why don't they in fact get out and run for office? A number of nomination meetings do not seem to be overly subscribed, so perhaps the law of supply and demand for MLAs is not one which can help us in determining our remuneration.

[Mr. Horsman in the Chair]

Oh, isn't this interesting? I'll have to really behave now; is that right?

I often also wonder about sports figures. I stand in amazement, as I'm sure others of you have, at the salaries and the contracts negotiated by some sports figures. It's just astronomical. I mean, how do you assess Wayne Gretzky's value to the NHL or to hockey in terms of what he's paid or what he gets in his contract? Is he worth \$2 million or \$3 million or more? I was at Candlestick Park a few weeks ago in San Francisco and had the opportunity to see the Atlanta Braves play the San Francisco Giants. There was Bobby Bonds of the Atlanta Braves, who I'm told has a contract for, I think, three years with the Atlanta Braves, and he draws over \$7 million in salary and benefits – one baseball player. He actually struck out all day long. It was extraordinary just to see this sort of \$7 million man on the baseball field.

On the other hand, there we see Bill Gates, who's the chairman of Microsoft: built this huge empire, we think on his own, though there's some speculation about some kind of deal that he was able to pull off because of his relationship with IBM. Nonetheless, a brilliant guy, Harvard-educated guy, gets out there in Redmond, Washington, and puts a software empire together. I take it now that he's the wealthiest or has the highest income of any other American in the entire United States, let alone, I'm sure, in the world. Bill Gates: is he really worth all that? How do we know? Is it part of a labour market supply/demand mechanism that gives him that kind of income or other considerations?

What about child care workers? It seems to me that those people – and I see them daily, those that attend to my four-year-old son in a day care – are very precious, special, and important people in the life of my four-year-old and of a lot of kids, yet I'm told that child care workers draw the least, or at the bottom of the heap, in terms of income and salary and benefits. Is that again a labour market determination of why they get that? Do a lot of people want to be child care workers? Is their work valued at that very low rate or what?

Of course, now we're getting into all kinds of issues about executive salaries, whether they be executives in big oil companies or in big banking institutes. You know, the Reichmanns after O & Y collapsed still seem to be doing quite well.

So I'm going to go on record here today to say that in the recent Peat Marwick study, as I read it, we have begun for the first time in any coherent and studied and balanced fashion, in my view, to grapple with this issue in terms of MLAs: how the value of MLAs either in this province or in other provinces, as I say, can be assessed some kind of economic worth in terms of salary and benefits.

4:20

I commend them. I thought that big consulting firms like William Mercer and others who did this more often would have come up with an even more precise job evaluation, job analysis, job description kind of approach, of methodology, and maybe they will. I think what we got out of the Peat Marwick study, in going around talking to representative MLAs from all caucuses in all

parts of the province, begins to say: "Okay; what do you do? What is your decision-making role? What are your other responsibilities?" It began to look at the job – the description of the job, how it's performed, what goes into it, and how you analyze it – and then set that beside comparators in other fields. So it looked at other MLAs in other provinces that may or may not have as big a revenue base as we do. It also looked at comparators, both MLAs and cabinet ministers, and comparators in the public and private sectors. It began to fill in this rather murky picture with some more precise understanding of the role of an MLA, the nature of the work of an MLA, a cabinet minister, and how, through comparators, we can see what perhaps the market would demand for the services of an MLA in Alberta.

Now, I've in fact often thought that we should even go further with this. For instance, in the two areas that I have looked at most especially in here, in health care and in energy, you know, I think it's quite important to realize that we have a Minister and Deputy Ministers of Health who, in my understanding, are paid a whole lot less than administrators, CEOs of big hospitals in this province. So here we have someone who's trying to run the system, fund the system, but we have administrators at several hospitals who draw down a much bigger package of remuneration than the minister over them. In fact, I'm told that the present CEO of the Toronto General hospital makes almost three times as much as the Minister of Health in Ontario. There seems to be an imbalance there. Moreover, the question is: why would someone want to be the Minister of Health if you have the skills and talent to be an administrator in a senior hospital? Similarly in the energy field. Now, I'm not sure how many oil and gas executives, people from the oil and gas industry, would want to leave their positions and come and run for office as an MLA. I see one member putting up a big zero. I don't know how many in the Assembly – perhaps the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon might come closest, and of course the current Minister of Energy has had some experience. It seems to me that again there are certain rates of pay out there in areas where we try to have some jurisdiction, whether it be in health care or energy, rubbing shoulders, dealing with those in those fields who are valued, are paid a whole lot more than the ministers and others from government who deal with them. It seems to me a kind of inequity, yet in fairness I think the Peat Marwick study began to look at that in terms of the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Health and their comparators in the private sector: how you would compare that; whether there's greater inequity there or not.

So it seems to me that we have a good starting base, should I say, both emotionally and morally and now in a kind of a studied approach because of the Peat Marwick study, to sit back and to say upon reflection: yes, let's try to, in a more reasoned approach, wrestle with these thorny issues in a much more fair, objective, informed, and balanced way as possible and establish, as we have before us this afternoon, "an independent commission to review the role and responsibilities of MLAs." It would seem to me that such an independent commission could look at these thorny issues, which have widespread implications but also have some very complex and, in some ways, inequitable kinds of issues attached to them, which the general public, I think, in large measure is neither aware of nor understands but which are left with us to have to decide for ourselves. Of course, as we've argued, that is where the greatest conundrum arises. Here we are seen like, I guess, members of a board of a company deciding our own salaries and benefits and pensions and all the rest.

It would be, perhaps, in our political interest as well as in the interest of the public as well as in the interests of developing a better analysis of this job as both MLA and minister of the Crown

to have an independent commission worry about it, to have an independent commission set up with representatives from the courts, from the Chamber of Commerce, from the Federation of Labour, from the municipalities, from groups on fixed income. I thought maybe we should have added a priest here because, God knows, they will need a lot of prayer in their deliberations. Nonetheless, to have a representative group who could look in a more balanced, fair, nonpartisan, arm's-length kind of approach at all these issues so that we don't have to debate them in the House, as we are today, or have to spend hours and hours in endless caucus meetings on Friday afternoons, as the government did last week, and have all of this blow up. In a way, that is so unfortunate, because as we know, there are so many other vital issues which we have to get on to.

So, Mr. Speaker, I submit this motion to set up this independent commission, and I would like some reflection in debate from others on what I know to be perhaps two problems. One would be: what if such a commission cannot come to some consensus, as we've recently had with the independent review of electoral boundaries. We had five commissioners, and it was kind of a hung jury, with five different maps. What to do at that point? I would hope that such an independent commission in this case would look fairly at the issue, be able to come as a tribunal or a commission to some consensus, and be able to have a recommendation that is borne out of their deliberations and will be binding on all of us. But there could be a problem: they might not get that consensus. Then what do we do?

The other problem I could foresee perhaps is whether or not their recommendations would be binding on us. Even though the Peat Marwick report recommended adjustments in pensions and so on but increasing our basic indemnity, they said: "Oh, no; we can't do that because the political climate isn't right for us to do that." What if the independent commission would come down and say that the comparators, the review of the job description, and the current market forces, as we understand them, would say that, yes, members of the Legislature should receive some increase of, say, 10 percent? Yet the political mood out there would be, you know: no way. Who would take the political heat? I mean, is this commission then going to face that political heat or what? Or is it going to be binding on us? Will we take the 10 percent even though we might not want to or everyone would get in trouble? So those are two problems which I think would hypothetically be seen to be problems with the independent commission, but I don't think they're insurmountable problems.

In conclusion, let me say that I think it would provide this kind of balanced, arm's-length, nonpartisan approach to what has, for us, been a very thorny and unfortunate issue, but it would at the bottom line seem to me to be a fairer approach to bringing a greater sense of fairness in this place, in what is around us often a very unfair world.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Parkallen.

MR. MAIN: Merci beaucoup, M. le Président. Félicitations sur votre nouveau travail.

I'm glad to be here to take part in this debate for a variety of reasons. One, because it raises a whole load of issues that are really, really fascinating: constitutional issues, business issues, legislative issues, responsibility issues, a whole variety of things that I think are quite fascinating. I guess the first thing it does is remind me of the old joke. I can't remember who the comedian was, but he was somebody from the past who said: never mind

paying them; put them all on commission. Perhaps that's a suggestion that may have some merit.

I was also interested to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre's description of the Minister of Health's compensation versus the administrator of a hospital's compensation. I guess if there were some correlation, there would be a scramble to be the minister of communications, for example, where you'd be responsible for television, get some compensation on a par with David Letterman; or the minister of recreation and sports and get something on a par with your friend Bobby Bonds that you mentioned in your address. I think the two are unrelated. I think a minister's job is one of developing public policy. The responsibility for a specific portfolio or portfolios is just a small proportion of what a minister/MLA does during his or her day-to-day, week-to-week work. I suppose, and I agree, that there should be some level of compensation for being a minister or having additional ministerial duties, because the MLA duties certainly don't go away. Whether that should be tied to the portfolio, tied to experience, tied to someone's good looks or size or ability to hit a baseball, I don't know if that is . . . If we paid on an avoirdupois scale, some would be wealthy, others would want to eat a lot, and others might starve. We don't do that, and I think that's a good idea.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

4:30

In terms of the motion though, Mr. Speaker, specifically the motion which is calling for the creation of "an independent commission to review the role and responsibilities of MLAs," I think we already know what the role and the responsibilities are. That's fairly well established. Then we want to establish salaries, benefits, and another review mechanism that carries on all this activity.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre lays out in his motion a list of membership that he believes would be useful in this, and there are some glaring errors and omissions that I would suggest. I would draw to the Member for Edmonton-Centre's attention a similar motion by his colleague from Edmonton-Jasper Place, a motion that I believe is now before the Members' Services Committee, which again represents an independent review body to look at recommendations. It, too, lists a whole range of individuals: labour, urban representatives, senior citizens. The member here suggests "people living on fixed incomes." There seems to be a real notion that we've got to get the entire demographic and politically correct and the right optics on this thing put together so that there can be no suggestion whatsoever that this is being done by an elitist group.

Well, let's assume for a minute, Mr. Speaker, that we could find an agreeable makeup of this independent commission and that we were able to strike the commission, lay out their job, what we wanted them to do, and then have them bring forward a recommendation. I guess we would find ourselves in somewhat of a pickle. This is something that we have debated in this Chamber, we've debated in our caucus, and I'm sure the members there have talked about it in theirs as well: who ultimately decides these issues.

I recall, Mr. Speaker, this past fall there was a leadership contest that went on in this province, and our current Premier was the victor in that. During the course of those debates and during various meetings an individual had – one-on-one, one-on-ten, one-on-fifty, or one-on-a-thousand – the issue of pay and compensation and how it would all be sorted out was one of the issues that was addressed. It was fascinating for me as a participant in that to

watch the bidding that was going forward. "Well, I would propose a 5 percent cut." "Well, I would propose a 10 percent cut." "I would propose a 15 percent cut." We had this big price war going on, trying to determine who would be the cheapest leader and what would be the cheapest MLA we could get.

We had a similar argument in my own nomination situation in Edmonton-Whitemud not that long ago, where one candidate was attempting to outbid the other by saying he would take a smaller pension than anybody else. That candidate eventually won, and as it turns out, he's got his wish. He obviously is a seer of some description. So it's funny how it goes. It's funny how it goes.

Mr. Speaker, my position during that time was that MLA compensation should be determined – and this is a quote from one of my speeches. If you didn't get copies, I have albums and tapes for sale in the lobby. The quote was that MLAs' compensation should be set in the real world, not in the political world; that we shouldn't have a look at all the other Legislatures across Canada to see what those MLAs in that province are getting and thereby justify what we're getting.

I think compensation for this job should be set in the real world. I think the way compensation is set now is somewhat out of date. It's a bit of an anachronism to have a salary and a tax-free allowance, although that practice of two-thirds, one-third is followed fairly closely in most Legislatures and Parliaments and, in many cases, city councils across our province. But I think that has grown up over time, when MLAs, many of whom still sit in this House and have been elected for a few terms, came here when compensation was ridiculous – ridiculously low.

I have spoken to one member who represented a far northern constituency, and he couldn't get anywhere in his constituency by car to see many of his constituents, had to fly in there, and had to pay out of his own pocket the cost of chartering a plane. I think in many respects the abilities that MLAs have now to travel, to communicate with their constituents through allowances provided to each MLA are good things. But the actual compensation package, the thing that arrives in the envelope at the end of the month, I think in some respects is outdated. What I would suggest, and what I did suggest in the past, is that the salary be the salary, and that if there need to be expenses for taking a, quote, client to lunch, for traveling to this meeting, for whatever, those expenses be submitted and they be reimbursed on an expense account basis, as they are in the real world. I think that would be appropriate, and I think that is something that should be done as a matter of fact. The Peat Marwick report, which has been alluded to and referenced here in this Chamber many times, suggests exactly that, that there should be a re-evaluation of the cash proportion of the compensation package to MLAs that more accurately reflects cash income that is taxable, as opposed to this split between income and expense allowance, which in my judgment and, I would hazard a guess, in 99 percent of the minds of the people here is in essence what they make.

But let's assume that you do that, Mr. Speaker. Let's assume that we agree to that. Then we agree, as the Peat Marwick report points out, that the pension plan was perhaps a little thicker than would be available in the real world. So there are adjustments made, and of course we have legislation before the House that will deal with that aspect of it. Well, let's assume for the moment for the purpose of this argument today, and I'm picking up on Motion 237, that it was not a consultant's report that was commissioned to make these recommendations. Let's assume it was an independent commission made up of

a judge from the Court of Queen's Bench; representatives of the public including the Alberta Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta

Federation of Labour, associations of Alberta municipalities; and groups representing people living on fixed incomes as is the direct quote from the member's motion. Let's assume that it was that body that gave us the recommendations for cash compensation and smaller pensions as outlined in the Peat Marwick report. Were that the case, we would now be debating two things, a reduced pension plan and a raise.

Now, I would put to you, Mr. Speaker, that the independence of that commission might make a wonderful recommendation. I would suggest to any member of this House on the government side, on the opposition side, or in the second opposition tiny slice of the House that any politician who would agree, would suggest, would put forward the notion that, "Well, the commission said we've got to get a raise; give us a raise," would be politically dead, because in the current climate in fact there are political judgments that must be made.

The judgment made by the government over the last five years was that there would be no increase beyond the increase that was brought in in 1989, which was described then as one to make up for five years of previous lack of increases. So we did a big catch-up, 30 percent. Everybody got murdered on that, especially the government, and then we did nothing for another five years. Now this report suggests we should have a raise. Well, Mr. Speaker, independent commission or no, ultimately the decision on compensation comes to this building, to this room, because it's a legislative function. You can have all the independent commissions in the world; ultimately, the decision lands here, and it's a political decision.

I know in the past there have been independent commissions – federally, provincially, civically, all over the map, all over the place – suggesting all kinds of different compensation packages. Oftentimes the legislators – the government, the opposition, the individual politicians – stick their heads out the window, have a look at the political traffic going up and down the street, and say: "It would be stupid for me to say yes to that independent commission. I will make a political decision and decide that, no, we won't have a raise." So while the independent review is useful and does provide some useful information, ultimately the decision lands here and it is up to MLAs to decide what they're worth.

4:40

I've asked this question in town hall meetings. I've asked this question as I've traveled around the province in my responsibilities as both a minister and as an MLA and as I was traveling during the leadership contest, asking folks about this. There are two responses you get, Mr. Speaker, two responses. Number one: "Boy, I'd love to get in there. That looks like a wonderful job, and I really want to be in there. I've served on the executive of this riding association. I've been a youth member. I love youth Parliament. I've been a page in the Legislature, and I really love it." You get that. The other response you get more often, and I had it today on the radio talk show I just happened to be hosting while I was looking around to re-enter the real world. The guy said, "I wouldn't do that job for a million dollars a year." Now, he might play shortstop for the Atlanta Braves for that, but he wouldn't come in to be an MLA and listen to some of the things that go on here for a million dollars a year. Why?

Well, I've described it this way. If you want to get elected as an MLA, here's the deal. You put your career on hold. You spend out your savings. You put your family, all your personal affairs and everything under a microscope. If you're lucky enough to get elected, they'll kick the snot out of you for four years, and if you don't blink, they'll elect you for another four years and

kick the snot out of you again. For that, you get about as much money as a junior high teacher.

AN HON. MEMBER: They get more.

MR. MAIN: Okay. Some of my colleagues who were involved in the education system are protesting my figures. I throw it out generally, in a ballparkish type of thing.

AN HON. MEMBER: The average teacher gets \$44,000.

MR. MAIN: We're not going to have a debate here on teachers' salaries.

You get middle five figures, and of course then you get that great big, huge, fat, giant, luxurious, thick, rich, golden handshake pension when the end comes. Well, maybe then, but certainly not now.

So what I'm attempting to say here, Mr. Speaker, is that MLA compensation is in the minds of MLAs important and in the minds of the public important, but I don't know that anybody is going to be able to determine what that should be, independent commission or no. Whether it's this motion that the Assembly agrees to and sets up this particular independent commission, whether we go to the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place and Members' Services and do his particular motion and his particular list of qualified candidates, or whether we hire some firm that does this for a living – that's what they do: compensation for individuals – no matter what we do, no matter what it is, it's going to come here. I'm making the same speech I made a couple of weeks ago on boundaries. Just like boundaries, no matter who you have doing it, no matter what's involved, no matter where the input comes, it comes here and we have to decide.

Well, I've gone a long way to talk about this motion, but I think there are some things that we should point out about the specific motion, Mr. Speaker, so we can determine whether we want to support this or whether we want to do something else. It would be useful, I think, to find out what has happened in recent history about MLA compensation as the government and the Legislature attempt to wrestle with this uncomfortable issue.

I'm sure there are a lot of people in the Assembly who, when they're asked what they are worth, say, "Well, make me an offer; I'm worth X," or X plus 10 or something. It's distasteful. If you're one on one with an employer, you may do all right. I guess if we were one on one with our constituents and went out and made a contract with them and said, "Listen; I'll be your MLA, and I'll do it for \$50,000; I'll do it for \$48,000; let's work out a contract," if you got together with your constituents and they hired you on a contract basis, that might be interesting. But the constituent who comes from an area of the province where people are very, very poor and underemployed, his MLA probably has to work twice as hard as the guy that comes from Megabuck Heights and is getting a hundred and fifty grand. So I don't think that would be fair. Then that raises: Well, what if you're elected Speaker? Where's that dough going to come from? What if you're named the Minister of Everything Under the Sun, as the Deputy Premier is? Should he get two or three times as much as the Minister of Just a Little Bit? I don't know if that's very fair. So these questions are really tough. It would be tough enough to answer these questions if you didn't have cameras and notepads and microphones and all those two and a half million taxpayers out there who are just waiting for you to make a mistake.

So what are we going to do with all this? Well, let's find out what we have done so far. Former Premier Don Getty in the spring of 1992 requested that Members' Services have a special

standing committee, that it review the possibility of requesting this independent review. That's under way. Then in August, Members' Services passed a motion which created a subcommittee on this job evaluation study, which is now referred to as the Peat Marwick study. We have that. That has now been made public. In October the recommendation was brought forward that Peat Marwick do this exercise. They have done it. That has been presented.

I guess in the absence of anything else, why don't we use that as a basis? Why don't we use that as a basis and say that MLAs should be paid – let's pick a number – \$65,000. Just pick a number; they should be paid \$65,000. If they have additional duties – whether they're the chairman of a government standing policy committee, the chairman of a commission, or they're involved with some other board or have legislative duties, as I happen to as the Deputy Chairman of Committees – there should be some additional compensation there. Yes or no? That's a debatable point. Maybe they should; maybe they shouldn't. I don't know.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. MAIN: No? Okay; so we don't have to do that.

I think the government, though, has additional responsibilities in terms of ministerial responsibility. Not only in terms of extra work and demands on schedules, but the cerebral and physical responsibility pressures are such that there should be compensation for being a minister. I had a call, again on the radio, the other day where someone suggested that in the nation of his birth, which was in Europe, if you were appointed minister, you had to resign as MLA. You didn't get an MLA salary; you were a minister. Well, that would be fine. I think you could do that. If you were an MLA, you get 65 let's say, and if you're a minister, you get 165 or some other number. I'm just throwing these number out; they're coming off the top of my head. What it is now: we say that you're an MLA and you get this much, and then a minister is additional. Why don't we just take away the one and put the responsibility on the government to pay the minister the entire thing?

I am saying all this to say this: ultimately, whatever you decide – whatever you decide, Mr. Speaker – it's got to come here. It can't be adjudicated, finally, outside the Legislature. It can be suggested. It can be recommended. It can be studied. It can be examined. Roles, responsibilities can all be laid out in a book. There can be meetings, there can be hearings, there can be traveling dog and pony shows with every conceivable – you could have two and a half million people on this committee, representing all aspects of Alberta society, and have that committee boil out a recommendation. But ultimately it's got to come here, and ultimately it becomes a political decision. That political decision will be weighed in the climate and the context of what is going on today.

It may be that sometime in the future – when Albertans are all working and are all prospering, when businesses are flourishing, when the budget is balanced and there is surplus cash in the Treasury, when unemployment is at zero, when there are no more single-parent families, kids aren't missing meals – we can say: sure, MLAs deserve an extra few bucks in their pay packet. But, Mr. Speaker, if an independent commission were to report and recommend that that happen, sometime between now and that date in the far-off future, I would suggest that it would be virtually impossible to agree to any recommendation of an independent body.

Things are moving ahead though. We do have reports. We do have recommendations. There are discussions happening. You've already seen the government move swiftly, boldly to do something about the pension issue, moving backwards and moving into areas that have been revered as sacrosanct. I could suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if the government were to move retroactively into pensions of senior citizens who are retired in seniors' home across this province, the opposition over there that's crying "foul" and begging for more would be fainting dead away with shock. Nevertheless, the government has done it to itself, has reached back in time into vested, contracted pension rights and has expropriated those because they had to. They had to. An independent commission wouldn't recommend that. I don't think an independent commission would recommend retroactive divesting and divesting of pension rights.

4:50

The hon. member thinks an independent commission, an independent review, and put your list of your little politically correct cross-sectional type folks on there and our problems are solved. Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. Problems will not be solved. We just will remove one problem and replace it with yet another, because in this job there are no easy answers. There are no simple solutions. There are no quick fixes. That's why it's so tough to get in here. There are 83 men and women who are charged with the responsibility of passing laws and dealing with the issues of the day. In this job, however you view it outside this room, we in here all know that the responsibilities are considerable. Along the front rows of the government benches there are more responsibilities that are even more considerable.

Mr. Speaker, you sit in a chair and you have responsibilities that are considerable. These are not well and completely and thoroughly understood outside this room, but we understand them, and we understand that with those duties comes the responsibility of having to make these kinds of tough decisions.

So while I support the hon. member, I should make it clear that I am one of those who thinks there should be some kind of external body that gets some sort of handle on this issue. I think I would support the recommendation of a change in cash compensation for MLAs, doing away with that tax-free allowance and making up for that in terms of straight cash. I know what the stories would say: MLAs vote themselves pay increase. I could bet you a cookie that that would happen. I think it should happen, though, and I think that should be an outcome. But whether that's recommended by me, the Member for Edmonton-Centre, the man in the moon, an independent commission, or the government, ultimately it will be a Bill, it will be voted on, and it will be legislators, individually and collectively, who have to make that decision.

I believe we do need, however, to update and make this a little more contemporary compensation. It won't matter to me, because the day before polling day, Mr. Speaker, my compensation from the taxpayers of Alberta through the Legislative Assembly ends, and I'll go off and do something else.

I would like to see that people who represent me and represent you and represent Albertans in the Legislature could come here knowing that whether they spend four, eight, 10, 50, or 100 years here, the work will be adequately and fairly compensated. It is a problem. I've talked to many, many people, because I think we need good people here and I encourage people to run. I have spent four years recruiting people. I have made some errors in judgment in some of the people I have approached to run, because some of them agreed to do that. But, Mr. Speaker, I think there's got to be fair and adequate compensation. I think for the energy

executive that my learned colleague for Edmonton-Centre referenced in his remarks, it would be pretty tough for someone making a large six-figure income with vast responsibilities to set all that aside – the business interests, the stocks, the bonds, the portfolio, and all that stuff – subject it to the scrutiny of an Ethics Commissioner and the scrutiny of the media, and come here and expect to get by on – I don't know – \$30,000 or \$40,000 a year. I don't think that's reasonable, and I don't think anybody would do that. Conversely, I don't think it's appropriate for someone who is a caucus researcher or a social worker or a teacher to go from that level of compensation and come in here and expect to make 150 grand. I don't think that makes any sense either.

Somewhere in there is a level of compensation that is fair, reasonable, and just. Whether it's designed by an independent commission as the Member for Edmonton-Centre suggests; whether it comes as the result of a study from individual experts hired by the government who operate independently from government and make a recommendation wholly, impartially, independently that way; whether it's the independent commission that's described by the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place in the issue that's before the Members' Services Committee; or whether it's me standing on my feet throwing out a couple of numbers here, all of that really is irrelevant to the point. The point is that the political process, the way we're constituted in this Legislature in this province, means that the issue has to come here.

So directly speaking to the question of should we support the motion, well, I don't know. I guess the general thrust of the thing is – I've come a long way to find out that I don't know what I'm talking about is what I think the member is thinking. But I will try to draw a ribbon around this and suggest that while I believe the intent of an independent commission is a good one and it's appropriate, I believe the list of participants drawn up by the Member for Edmonton-Centre is too narrow. It does not provide the expertise or the broad-based, real-world experience that I think we need, and I think the process the government is moving along on – and it has demonstrated its leadership on pensions – will bear fruit.

I think compensation will be fair for MLAs. I think compensation will be fair for ministers. I think it will take into account the realities of today. I think it will deal with the kinds of issues that have been criticized. I think the notion of MLAs getting large salaries for figurehead positions will be dealt with. I think the notion of special pay for little things that are done on the side will be dealt with in an appropriate fashion. I can't make a judgment on that one way or the other, but you hear comments made. I think everybody will come to this work pleased, comforted, and secure in the knowledge that when they take time out of their business world, come here, do that work, and go back to that, there'll be some understanding in the real world that this is a sacrifice, irrespective of the fact that during the four years I've spent here, I've thoroughly enjoyed this. This three and a half years is the best job I ever had. It was great, a great, great job. Not everybody believes me. They look at you like you're from Mars when you talk that way sometimes, but it's true. It's really true.

I hope more people will avail themselves of the opportunities that present themselves each three, four, or five years during the electoral process. They should be secure in the knowledge that they will be compensated adequately, fairly, reasonably, and appropriately for that work. They also better understand, Mr. Speaker, that no matter who trumpets the notion of an independent commission to take all that decision-making away from you, it's going to land here one way or the other.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Three Hills.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to support the Member for Edmonton-Centre on this motion. I'm interested to see that he is acknowledging the value of merit pay. That is an interesting concept coming from that corner. We need to pay people according to the value of what they do.

Mr. Speaker, the question before us is: who should ultimately determine the salary of MLAs, government employees, which is in essence what we are? I think the question today in the political climate that we have is almost moot. People are demanding more public input, more right in saying what is going to happen to their tax dollars, and for us to deny them any say in what will be our pay, our perks, and our pension I think dims the fact that they're not willing to have that continue. If we're going to be credible to the electorate, we need an outside body that will look at salaries and benefits.

Mr. Speaker, we ask the electorate, after they've voted us into positions of authority, to trust us in the decisions we make. We assure them that the decisions we make will be in their best interests and that we will only do that which is going to be good for them in the long run. Surely we can entrust ourselves into the hands of a commission that is approved of by this body, that we see as being informed and able to make good recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, what are the benefits of an independent commission? I think the first benefit is objectivity. Those outside the process are much more able to deal with MLA pay when it's at arm's length. They can look on and discuss with all members what is required, what is needed, and then from a very objective view say that this is fair and this is right.

5:00

The second benefit is that we do not have to spend time defending MLA pay. There are far better things to do in a Legislature than to defend MLA pay, MLA pensions. If it's done by others, we can stand back as really dispassionate observers and say, "This is not our call; this is what your peers out there have said." Then we're able to put into effect what has been approved by a commission. If there is not full agreement by a commission, if there are minority views, then we can vote on all views put forth. That is, if there's a minority view, we can vote on that. Ultimately, it's going to mean that we're not deciding ourselves.

I think the third benefit is that MLAs make their arguments to the commission. The Member for Edmonton-Parkallen would do a tremendous job on behalf of MLAs in going and presenting all the work and effort MLAs put in. It would not be as if we had no input to what we do. It wouldn't be as if we had no input to encourage a commission to make sure our pay is fair and reasonable.

Mr. Speaker, the public is tired of what they perceive as elected people dipping deeper into the public purse. I think the thing every member here wants more than anything else is to have the respect of the public and that we can be credible before the public, and then when we go to the public at election time, we'll be able to say, "We have served in your best interests." If we have been perceived to have only been, as my hon. friend from Edmonton-Whitemud has said, 'snorking at the torf,' we're not going to be able to go to them with the credibility we need.

It's really only in the last 20 years that compensation has been brought into the parliamentary system for elected people. Prior to that, serving was simply a privilege and an honour. You were remunerated for any out-of-pocket expenses, but in reality people saw the opportunity to serve in the Legislature and to serve the people of a province or a state or a country as a privilege. People

elected honourable people to do the honourable thing. Mr. Speaker, we need to begin that process whereby we can assure people that we are doing the honourable thing by relieving ourselves of some of that power and putting it back in the hands of the people. Let's be willing to put our necks on the line and, as the Member for Edmonton-Parkallen said, let our peers out in the real world help us decide what our pay and our pensions should be. I think this is a good step on the way to citizen initiative. Many members in this House would support citizen initiative, whereby citizens can bring forth ideas and have them voted on. We need that public input.

So the decision is not ultimately political if we leave it to an independent commission. I think what the Member for Edmonton-Centre is really talking about is trust. Do we trust the citizenry of Alberta to put forth and put on the table what will be our salaries and our benefits? Can we trust them to deal with us fairly? We're asking them to deal with us. We're asking them to trust us. I don't think it's wrong for that to be reciprocal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-McCall.

MR. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I would get into this debate today. I'm not one that gets up and talks a lot but maybe has a lot to say.

Mr. Speaker, the motion before us today is to "urge the government to create an independent commission to review the role and responsibilities of MLAs." First of all, I would like to say that this basically has been done and certainly has been done well by a group of professionals contracted through the Members' Services Committee, whose membership is made up of all parties in this House and business is done in public. It's interesting to note that whilst the member opposite has presented this motion, well intended I'm sure, his party, the NDP – and I've been known to call them other things and usually do in public – has membership on that committee. I believe they have a couple of their members as participants, as have the Liberals a participant. I think they can argue well whether reports should be done or not, and of course with their support an expenditure of about \$125,000 was authorized to have Peat Marwick Stevenson & Kellogg retained to examine the issue of MLAs' compensation.

Mr. Speaker, the compensation for elected officials is not an easy one to determine, and years ago I went through the same agonizing situation. I guess it was about 1980, when I was a member of council in the city of Calgary, when an independent committee similar to the one the member has proposed in his motion was given the opportunity to discuss aldermanic and mayoralty salaries within the city of Calgary. It cost a lot of money to do that, and of course at that time there were 15 members, including the mayor. Well, the bottom line on that report – and this was made up of people from labour, industry, citizens, what have you – was that the aldermen and the mayor were well underpaid for what they were doing.

Well, what happens? I've been through one of these and another one subsequent to that. What happens to those things? If we all look inward and we're all honest with ourselves, we generally end up allowing the majority to take these reports and say, "Well, it's well done, well researched, and probably it's correct." The minority view is, "We can go and make some political hay out of this," and maybe we didn't like the way it was done. But at the same time membership on the Members' Services Committee is voting in favour of having one of these done at a cost of \$125,000. Now they want to spend more money to have another one done by a different group. I'm sure that if

we did this, the Liberals would want one done separately, too, with their own bunch of people that would give them the answers they feel they need.

Now, in my view, Mr. Speaker, we've asked for a report, which was done. The names of all the interviewed people are in this report, including the Liberals and the NDPs who obviously gave information that had these experts reach a conclusion we all know about, in that we are underpaid for the function we provide for the communities of Alberta.

In one case, as I remember it, the leader of one of the parties suggested we should accept these reports when they're done. But the majority, the government, brings forward a Bill that anoints the report, and what happens? The opposition says: "Aha, now we can make some political hay. We can go out and say to everybody that the MLAs are going to do this, that, and the other thing. They're overpaid. They get too much here; they've got too much there." Yet they'll stand in this House and say that tongue in cheek and pray to God that the majority will ensure the passage of a Bill to save their skin. My God, that is the fact.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, politicians in general are not very bright when it comes to salaries. In fact, I'd call them downright stupid. What happens is that they take nothing for years – nothing – not even an increase that equates to the value we offer employees of the government, the public service, or the private sector. They don't take anything that relates to the CPI or inflation. What they do is go and take a chunk and get hammered for it. The one flaw in our system is that we don't have something in place to ensure that politicians keep up to others that are taking from the trough. As such, we get hammered, and we get hammered pretty big time. Most of us can roll with that, because you can go out and explain the function of an MLA, for example. Some don't want to do that, and the people who don't, that are getting some of the salaries around here, have probably never made that much money in their life and think they're in heaven. But many of us have come here for intentions other than money, because I would suggest that at least most on this side of the House could probably make a heck of a lot more money working in the private sector than sitting here doing what we're doing. Many have sacrificed careers and businesses endeavouring to do what they would like to do for the benefit of the community they promote or survive in and for the people of Alberta.

But we live in an adversarial House, Mr. Speaker. This is an adversarial place. It's adversarial basically because some people think they can make political brownie points when they too are being benefited and will not reject that benefit even though the other people, the majority, get banged around for doing it. Every person in this House took an increase that we the government got hammered on. Is anybody over there willing to give up those benefits that they're so blatantly hammering the government on out in the community? "Oh, they've got too much of this, but I took it and feel good about taking it." Is anybody not going to take it? No. There's a term in *Beauchesne* I would like to use – it's been used loosely around here this last week or two – but I refrain from using the term "hypocrisy" because it's out of order.

How many people entering the political arena have taken a financial hit by being here? Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say most of us on this side of the House; on the other side, maybe not too many.

MR. SPEAKER: Only on this side of the House?

MR. NELSON: Well, I think we're a little brighter on this side, more career oriented, more free enterprise and people oriented

than the socialists on the other side. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that most of them have probably never made this much money in their life.

MR. HYLAND: Don't forget we've got some on that side too.

MR. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as far as I'm concerned, some of the members on the other side are on our side too. I wouldn't infer that my colleagues are socialists.

I'm being kind too, Mr. Speaker, because I don't normally call a lot of them socialists either. I usually use another phrase, which I've been called on, too, on occasion. So I will not use the phrase "Commies" any more today or in the future.

AN HON. MEMBER: Promise?

MR. NELSON: Commies, Communists, whatever you want to call it.

Mr. Speaker, there's the whole aspect of reinventing a wheel that's already been well researched and well defined and reported in the work done by Peat Marwick. I would invite all members, especially those on the other side of the House who may not have digested this report – because I've had the opportunity, having been in charge of a large corporation in this country as well as owning a small business, of going through these types of things in the private sector as well as in the public sector. I have to say that I give all the credit in the world to the Members' Services Committee – which includes members from the opposite side, and I'm referring to the other parties – who charged Peat Marwick to do this report, gave them the terms of reference, and accepted this report, because I think they did a good job and the report came back as a good report, in fact a first-class report, identifying the roles and also the compensation that should be expected by elected members.

Now, in my other life as an alderman in the city of Calgary, when we went through this in a public way, I must say I opposed an increase to the aldermen. Mr. Speaker, I did that because in my view it was a part-time job, and I still believe it is. I know that in the city of Calgary aldermen don't get very much. They get about \$47,000 a year now plus an expense account. They get a car allowance, they have 50 grand for an executive assistant in their office, and the perks go on and on. I don't hear the taxpayers in Calgary going on about that, the reason being that the aldermen down there become unified in the position they've taken even though there are some that don't agree with it. I know that when I objected to that increase back in the late '70s, I didn't take it. In fact, at my request the money I was to take was given to some high school students as scholarships.

Mr. Speaker, I would have expected a similar situation from all those people over there who stand up and wave their red flags and object to the majority taking a very strong position.

MR. TAYLOR: Better a flag than a nose.

MR. NELSON: At least I've got a nose.

So let's really be honest, Mr. Speaker. The report initiated by the former Premier and this government quantified through a Members' Services Committee, with all parties represented on this committee agreeing to the report and yet standing in their places yelling and screaming every day that it isn't worth its salt . . . The government, honouring their commitment and the commitment from all members in this House by acceptance of this report by Members' Services, an all-party committee, prepared legislation under the auspices of this report which was accepted by all members of each party on the Members' Services Committee. I

cannot stress that too much, because the Members' Services Committee is made up of representatives from every part of this House. For the opposition to continually bang away and suggest it is the government doing this is absolute nonsense. And it is in error, because the government presents the opportunity, accepted by all, and what happens? They sit back on their laurels, play political games, and away we go. As I said before, this is an adversarial House, and I guess you have to accept it. Again, I won't use that word that has been used so many times in recent days.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note the study did find that MLAs and ministers are paid less than some equivalencies in the private sector and also that MLAs in Alberta are paid about middle of the road as far as politicians in similar positions in Canada are concerned.

Now, what about expenses? I'll bet you that over there they're going to get their expenses paid just like everybody else is entitled to. Everybody's entitled to benefits. A hundred dollars a day is not very much money to live on, to get your dry cleaning done, housekeeping, dinner, breakfast, transportation, whatever else. I can guarantee you that in the private sector your real expenses would be paid for, and if they weren't, you'd be screaming. Your health benefits are no different; they're equivalent to the private sector. I don't think most of us have turned those down.

Mr. Speaker, the results of the Kellogg study show that their job evaluation plan is proven and is well accepted within the industry. These people that looked into this whole aspect of compensation did so with no axe to grind, no political motives, and went out and did an honest evaluation. We all know – and if anybody doesn't think this would happen, they're fooling themselves – that as soon as you go into the community and do as the member's suggesting here and get a judge, the Federation of Labour, and associations of Alberta municipalities, each one of those has a political affiliation. Even though I believe they would come back with a report that would show MLAs are probably underpaid, the politics of that – well, I guess it kind of smells, quite frankly.

I do believe the Members' Services Committee – again, made up of members from each part of this Legislature – took the appropriate route and did the right thing and got a good report. So, Mr. Speaker, in my estimation, to duplicate that in a nonprofessional way would certainly not do us justice.

Mr. Speaker, I have a few more comments, but in view of the hour, I would like to ask to adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion before us is to adjourn debate. Those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, we have on the Order Paper of the Assembly Motion 39, for which oral notice has already been given. I wonder, sir, if the procedure could be such that I could bring forward Motion 39.

MR. SPEAKER: The request is to revert to government business. The request will need unanimous consent of the House to deal with Motion 39. All those in favour of going to item 39, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

Assembly that the House will not be sitting tonight. The business for tomorrow afternoon, sir, will be second reading on government Bill 66.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The matter fails.

[At 5:28 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 2:30 p.m.]

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise the

