

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 6, 1993**

2:30 p.m.

Date: 93/05/06

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving both our province and our country.

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Drumheller.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present today a petition by 670 Albertans in support of the Minister of Community Development.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition from 31 citizens of Eckville and area requesting "the immediate removal of the Eckville Health Care Centre Board and the Administrator."

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. CHIVERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May the petition that I presented earlier be now read and received?

CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta urge the Legislative Assembly to call upon the Government of Alberta, immediately and before the next election, to reduce pension benefits which will be payable to MLAs and Cabinet Ministers leaving office at or before the next election to a level comparable to other pension plans.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, may the petition I presented yesterday be read and received.

MR. SPEAKER: I guess the polite answer is no. How about tomorrow?

MR. WICKMAN: Okay; tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Perhaps, hon. members, since this has happened two days in a row, members would be kind enough to contact the Table before the session. That would be much more convenient for all concerned. Thank you very much.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the hon. Provincial Treasurer I wish to give oral notice that the government will introduce Bill 67, the Deficit Elimination Act, probably the first of its kind. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] All right. Thank you, hon. members. Now that you've had that bit of enthusiasm, perhaps you'd follow the tradition of first reading.

Deputy Premier, in terms of the notice.

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

Be it resolved that the debate on second reading of Bill 66, Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Amendment Act, 1993 (No. 2), shall not be further adjourned.

[interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please, so we might get on to the next business.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 355
Volunteer Tax Credit Amendment Act, 1993

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 355, the Volunteer Tax Credit Amendment Act, 1993.

Mr. Speaker, there are thousands and thousands of volunteers in Alberta who give freely of their time, and this will allow for a tax credit, sir, to be given to those people who render volunteer services to charitable organizations.

[Leave granted; Bill 355 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure today in tabling a draft white paper entitled Breaking New Ground: the Government of Alberta Responds to Creating Tomorrow. After further input and subsequent debate I'm sure it will form the basis for the final white paper, which will describe agricultural policy in Alberta for future years.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file today with the Legislative Assembly four copies of the progress report of the Job Enhancement Advisory Committee entitled Getting Results 2. This report contains a brief summary of each project funded by the committee, which was a four-year program under the Premier's nursing initiatives.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to file four copies of the forestry, lands and wildlife annual report 1991-92.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Highwood, followed by Taber-Warner.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 25 enthusiastic students from Cayley school in the constituency of Highwood. They are led by their teacher Ms Bleackley and by parents and assistants Mrs. Brown, Mrs. McDonald, Ms Bates, Ms Abel, and Mr. Lester. They're in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly 46 visitors from Barnwell school. Barnwell is the fastest growing municipality in Alberta, and the Barnwell school excels in the Taber school division. I would ask these visitors to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: West Yellowhead.

MR. DOYLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and to the other members of the Legislature two hardworking women, one from Hinton and one from Edson, who are in the public gallery. Louise Gale is from Hinton and Carrie Hutton. Would you please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to introduce to you and to the Assembly today the Minister of Labour from Saskatchewan, the Hon. Ned Shillington, and also his chief of staff, Heather Padfield. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask if they would stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

2:40

Health Care System

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, after 22 years in government the free enterprise rhetoric of the Conservative Party I think has finally gone to the heads of the government. Slowly but surely medicare in Alberta is being eroded by competition from doctors who set up private clinics, private labs, and private health care diagnostic equipment. Slowly but surely what's happening is this: patients can jump the queue for diagnosis if they've got the money. You know what happens after that? They get into the hospital quicker for treatment. I think that's wrong. I think the Liberals are wrong when they support private medicine; I think the Conservative government is. I'd like to ask the Minister of Health if she has contemplated the consequences of having private MRI labs in Alberta, which in turn get people into treatment sooner than going through the public system.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the subject of private labs, private MRIs has been raised in the Assembly before. The private labs and MRIs are essentially looking after third-party insurance, WCB claims, and so on. I would assure the hon. member that there is no public money in those private labs and that there is no public money flowing from those private labs.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think the minister understands that there's a slippery slope happening here and that it's moving fast. The minute you start having private interocular lens facilities, private facilities for diagnostic work, the sooner people get into the public health system. If you're diagnosed earlier through the private one, which costs you \$800 or a thousand bucks, you're in the hospital faster to get things fixed. This erodes the concept of universality in medicare. My question to the minister is: what will it take for her to step in and prevent this slippery slope from sliding all the way to the bottom and destroying medicare?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes an assumption that when work is done at a private lab, you jump the queue into the hospital system. That is an assumption that I would suggest you should show some substantia-

tion for before you make it, because I have no indication that that indeed occurs.

However, I should say, Mr. Speaker, that we have a committee established from Alberta Health and from the Alberta Medical Association that is looking into this issue and made a commitment to report to me at the time of putting the committee in place in about six weeks. I expect the initial report from that committee in about two weeks.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, methinks we might not be sitting in the House in two weeks.

I'd like to ask the Premier if he understands the issue. I'll try to make it clear one more time. If you go to a private MRI lab, you pay \$800 or a thousand bucks; you get diagnosed faster. What that means is that the patient gets to go into treatment faster than those who have to wait for the public-sector MRI labs. It's called queue jumping. Is the Premier willing to step in and take charge of this issue to make sure that our medicare system isn't eroded by this?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. Minister of Health has it well under control.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to designate the second question to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MLA Pensions

MR. CHIVERS: Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Premier. In 1985 this Assembly passed a law imposing on the government a mandatory, statutory duty to create a board which amongst other things was charged with the duty to advise the government about a variety of issues relating to the administration and functioning of the MLA pension plan. This board was created by the Assembly but was never appointed by the government. Will the Premier explain why this government ignored its statutory duty to create this MLA pension watchdog for over eight years?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, in 1985 I was the mayor of the city of Calgary, and we were looking after our own salaries and problems related to the municipality. I have no idea what the hon. member is talking about.

MR. CHIVERS: That's no answer, Mr. Speaker.

This board that never was created is empowered to make recommendations to the Treasurer concerning the adequacy of contributions to meet benefits. Does the Premier acknowledge that had the government appointed this board in 1985 and permitted it to fulfill its mandate and address the adequacy of contributions to meet benefits, taxpayers might not now be faced with this enormous unfunded liability?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that perhaps this resolution was passed at some time, but I can't acknowledge that I knew about it, because I don't know about it.

MR. CHIVERS: Mr. Speaker, I assume that the government is taken to know the laws that it passed. This is the Bill.

This government has not hesitated to create a multitude of questionable boards and commissions filled with patronage appointments. Clearly, however, a board that they could have appointed which could have recommended MLA pension reform

and could have prevented an enormous unfunded pension liability and would have been a financial benefit to taxpayers was not appointed. How does the Premier rationalize the failure to appoint the MLA pension board, which could have brought about changes and could have avoided this huge unfunded liability?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, I'm going to defer this to the hon. Deputy Premier, who was around at that particular time.

With respect to the pension issue, Mr. Speaker, I think we will resolve that issue through Bill 66, which proposes simply to eliminate it. They'll have nothing more to worry about.

Hon. Deputy Premier.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'll respond as the Acting Provincial Treasurer today, but I think the point has been made by the hon. Premier. The fact of the matter is that we have legislation before this House which will terminate - terminate - the MLA pension plan.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of the Liberal Party.

Election Timing

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been four years and two months since the last provincial election in this province. Last week the Premier teased Albertans with the prospect of an immediate election. Now he is saying that he will delay the election until he gets feedback from his candidates. What he means is: he wants to see what the polling results show following the budget today. Albertans are tired of being manipulated by this government. Albertans deserve the right to pass judgment on this budget and 22 years of Conservative government. Will the Premier allow Albertans this right and call the election tomorrow?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I might call it tomorrow or next week or maybe in the fall or sometime before March 20, 1994. As I've said, the election will be called sooner or perhaps later. It could be right around the corner, or it could be down the block.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the members opposite are well aware, the Liberal opposition has produced a comprehensive document outlining 28 specific parliamentary reforms. It's titled Mandate for Change. One of those 28 reforms, sir, would have fixed election dates so that ordinary Albertans would have as much information on election dates as the Premier, like we do already with our municipal governments. Will the Premier agree that it is no longer acceptable for the government to manipulate the date of the provincial election and commit to reforms that will see fixed dates for elections in this jurisdiction?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, throughout the course of time and under the British parliamentary system governments represented by all parties, including the Liberal Party, have had the privilege of calling an election when the time was right within a five-year mandate. That is one of the fundamental principles of our parliamentary democracy.

MR. DICKSON: Well, those Albertans think the system is in fact broken and requires fixing, Mr. Speaker.

As we've seen during the Calgary-Buffalo and more recent Three Hills by-elections, the government also has the ability to manipulate and delay the dates of by-elections to the disadvantage of those Albertans. When will the Premier accept the Liberal

proposal in our Mandate for Change paper that by-elections be held no later than three months after the vacancy occurs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, the calling of elections or by-elections is one of the fundamental privileges allocated to the governing power under our British parliamentary system. I might remind the Legislature that the hon. leader of the Liberal Party commented that he felt useless because of the system. Well, I find it strange that anyone would feel useless under a system that has evolved over the past 700 years and has become the framework for the best democratic process in the world.

2:50

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Little Bow, followed by West Yellowhead. [interjections]

MR. WICKMAN: Ask about Dick Johnston's budget.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, Edmonton-Whitemud. Thank you. [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MITCHELL: You're welcome.

MR. SPEAKER: I'm glad to see you're getting polite in your old age.

Little Bow.

Social Services Caseloads

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Several allegations have been made recently concerning the high caseloads and the workload standards that child welfare workers have to labour under. Will the minister tell this Assembly what workload standards for social workers this department does have?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to advise the hon. member and this Assembly that this department and this government has a budget of over \$155 million under child welfare. My department in fact in the past several years has worked jointly with frontline workers to develop a standard, a model that would be used as far as the workload, and this model is in place. It's being utilized, and it seems to work very well in relation to delivering services for the clientele.

MR. SPEAKER: Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary. I understand that you have added staff to your department in this particular area when other departments may be downsizing. Can you ensure appropriate manpower has been allocated in this particular field to handle these very concerns, Mr. Minister?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to indicate again to the hon. member and this Assembly that we do allot staff resources based on projected caseloads across each region of the province. In fact, in the last four years my department has added 81 new child welfare workers for the province. In addition to that, under the handicapped children's services we've doubled the staff from 35 to 70. You can be assured, as I've indicated to this House before, that that area of the department is the number one priority for this minister.

MR. SPEAKER: West Yellowhead, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MLA Pensions (continued)

MR. DOYLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the New Democrats released figures showing that taxpayers have to foot the bill for about 93 percent of the more than \$33 million in pension benefits that will be paid to retiring MLAs. I remind the Assembly that the Member for Taber-Warner has already drawn some \$96,000 in double-dipping pension since 1987. This means he will have drawn all of his contributions plus interest out of this plan in the next seven months after retiring. I'd like to ask the Premier: does the Premier think it is fair that taxpayers should be left holding the bag for more than \$2.9 million by which the Member for Taber-Warner's pension . . .

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. [interjection] Order. The member knows full well that this is going to be ruled out of order because of the Bill that's presently before the House. You have violated anticipation. I'm sorry. Once the Bill has reached second reading stage, anticipation rules.

Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Eckville Hospital

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Citizens in the Eckville area are very concerned over what they believe to be improprieties occurring within the hospital. These are improprieties that apparently have resulted in an investigation by the local RCMP. Unable to get information from their hospital board and concerned about health care decisions that are being made either without or against the wishes of the community and after appealing to their MLA and the Department of Health with no at least satisfactory response, the citizens have now circulated a petition to have the board and administrator removed. My questions are to the Minister of Health. We've been told that the RCMP investigation would be a lot easier if they had better co-operation from that hospital board. I'd like to know what the minister has done to make sure that the board co-operates fully with the RCMP to get on with it.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the concerns expressed by some of the residents of Eckville. My department is also aware of those concerns. I am not aware of any concern by the RCMP as to co-operation.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, there's something terribly wrong here when citizens feel strong enough that they're circulating a petition and asking for removal of their board and administrator. I'd like to ask the minister if she will move quickly to resolve what is a very disruptive force in this community.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, my first concern, of course, is to patient care in the Eckville area. I and my department are monitoring this situation very carefully, and we are assured and feel quite confident that patient care is not being jeopardized or in any danger. I will reiterate again to the hon. member: I am aware of the concerns, my department is aware of the concerns, and we are addressing the issue appropriately.

MR. SPEAKER: Redwater-Andrew, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Agricultural Policy

MR. ZARUSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. The minister just tabled a report, Breaking New Ground, and I think Albertans will receive this report very well, because it goes so well to the pioneers, the people that first came here and broke the soil and worked it. A question to the minister: does that mean, Mr. Minister, that it's going back to the grass roots? What are the next steps of this report?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what it means. All of the 2,000 participants in Creating Tomorrow will be receiving in the near future a copy of the draft white paper and given an opportunity for input through the recently announced self-funded industry advisory committee on agriculture and food. Once that input is received, as I alluded to in my tabling, we will undoubtedly draft the final version of the white paper on agricultural policy, bring it to the Legislature, hopefully debate it, and pass it.

MR. ZARUSKY: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary to the minister. All these programs and reports naturally create a financial burden and cost to the taxpayer. I know our Treasurer has indicated that we will be coming down with a strong restraint budget. The minister has indicated that some funding will be done by groups and in areas working in agriculture, but some of these things can naturally cost a lot of money. Where is this financing going to come from?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I think there's a realization building in the agricultural community in this province that we will have to play our role and pay our share in bringing the deficit under control, in dealing with the debt of the province. I think the messages certainly came through loud and clear in the Creating Tomorrow consultations that we had to let our industry become more market responsive. We have to get to the point where more of the return is coming from the marketplace and less is coming from government programs. I think the message also came through loud and clear that government programs that are commodity specific and price supportive are sending the wrong signals to producers, and many of them prefer that our programs take a generic switch to let them read their signals from the marketplace as opposed to from the programs.

Social Workers Contract Negotiations

MS MJOLSNESS: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Premier today. Since the 1990 social workers' strike there has been ongoing consultation to establish workload standards with no positive changes whatsoever. In fact, their caseloads have increased. The contract with the social services workers of local 6 of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees expired more than a year ago, and the very conditions and issues that sent social workers out on strike in 1990 remain unresolved. I'd like to ask the Premier: given that the people of Alberta are not being served because of the onerous workloads that social workers have been forced to cope with and the fact that this problem has been exacerbated by the volunteer severance program, because positions are not being filled, will the Premier now show some leadership and agree to instruct government negotiators to deal with the important issues, such as caseloads?

3:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, I don't know, Mr. Speaker, if caseloads are specific to the negotiations, but I do know that negotiations are to take place next Tuesday. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Labour would care to comment further.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is entirely correct. It's really never been the policy of this government to have negotiations taking place here during question period, and I'm sure that with the goodwill that can be evidenced in a co-operative spirit, things will be accomplished as these negotiations continue.

MS MJOLSNES: Mr. Speaker, negotiations have been ongoing for quite a while, and they're not getting anywhere.

My supplementary to the Premier. On May 9, 1990, this government in this very Assembly promised to order the government negotiators, and I quote: "to be ready to partake instantly in meaningful negotiations on the matter of the social workers' working conditions, caseloads, and salaries." That's a very clear directive, and it hasn't happened yet. I'd like to ask the Premier: will the Premier now live up to this promise made in 1990 by this government and deal with these crucial issues immediately.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, negotiations are to take place Tuesday, and I can't get into the specifics right now as to what is on the table and what is not on the table. Again, I will have the hon. minister add to my comments.

MR. DAY: Further to that, Mr. Speaker, the master agreement of course has been agreed on, and 10 of the 12 subsidiaries are negotiating. These of subsidiary 6 are going ahead next week, so we encourage everybody to work together to a solution.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West.

Machinery and Equipment Tax

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another example of this government's failure to deal with issues is the machinery and equipment tax. Since 1987 there have been at least three different reviews of the M and E tax, and we still don't have a resolution or a decision on this issue. My question today is to the chairman of the committee asked to review the machinery and equipment tax. Can the chairman advise the House about when his committee is going to prepare a report for the Legislature and resolve this issue?

MR. SPEAKER: Order. The Chair needs clarification. Whose committee is this? Was this a government committee? If it's a government committee, then you will not be recognized; the Minister of Municipal Affairs will be.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is a government committee. Reluctantly, the chairman that was doing work on it has been relieved of that position. We will be looking in the future to the machinery and equipment tax along with all the tax levels in the province of Alberta as to their appropriateness and how they work within a good environment for business.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, I guess it's true: this member has been muzzled then.

My supplementary question I guess to the Premier: since we're reviewing another commission now, can the Premier advise the House how many more reviews are going to have to be taken

before the government finally resolves this issue and then acts on the issue?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll defer to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I answered that question. We have been looking at the machinery and equipment tax, but there isn't consensus throughout the province. The machinery and equipment tax generates about a \$170 million in taxes. Only about 4 percent of those taxes that are collected relate to the cities. The rest relate to the municipal areas throughout the province: the counties and MDs and other jurisdictions. It's very important to them that when we look at removing a tax such as the machinery and equipment tax, we replace it with a tax that will offset the burden of taxation to those individual municipalities where they're already taxed to the nth degree. We would like to look and I assure the hon. member that we will be looking at the machinery and equipment tax along with all the other taxes that we have in the province to see if we can't come up with a better way of directing cash flow into this government.

MR. SPEAKER: Drayton Valley, followed by Edmonton-Jasper Place.

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

MR. SPEAKER: You're not recognized, Westlock-Sturgeon. [interjection] Order.
Drayton Valley.

International Trade and Tourism

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In discussions with some of my constituents who are actively involved in exporting energy expertise and technology and others who are involved in the tourism area, there's some concern being raised about this government's plans for international markets. I would like to ask the Minister for Economic Development and Tourism just how he plans to increase both exports and tourism receipts.

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, this was addressed very thoroughly in a document called Seizing Opportunity: Alberta's New Economic Development Strategy. Very definitely we will be working with and facilitating small business and industry to achieve the Alberta target that is set in this document. As you remember, this document was an accumulation of public input over numerous months over the last two years. That target is to take trade from \$19 billion to \$24 billion. Also in the tourism area the industry developed a very detailed plan called Tourism 2000: A Vision for the Future. The target there is to take the receipts from \$2.8 billion to \$4.4 billion, which is a very achievable goal. We'll be working with the industry to achieve their goals.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Drayton Valley.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coming from a province that's so dependent on exports, I appreciate knowing the importance that you place on the international sector, but, Mr. Minister, how many jobs do you feel you can accommodate in this and how many jobs are we talking about?

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, the document shows the industry's goals, not our goals. In tourism the document shows that there's

the opportunity for the tourism industry to create some 17,800 jobs, and if we meet the target set in exports, taking it from \$19 billion to \$24 billion, the opportunity is there to create 75,000 jobs. That is 92,000 jobs out of the total target of 110,000 over the next four years.

Game Ranching

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, three years ago in this Assembly the government rammed Bill 31, the Livestock Industry Diversification Act, through the House under closure. That's the game ranching Bill, for those who don't remember. At that time the government not only refused the reasonable request that I put forward with the Member for Vegreville for a scientific review and an environmental impact assessment, but in fact they ridiculed that very request. Well, in the past three years this issue has blown up in the government's face. The current cost to the taxpayers is \$15 million and counting to control a serious outbreak of tuberculosis. I would like to ask the Minister of Environmental Protection what action he is taking to remedy this serious blunder taken by the government three years ago.

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you and many members of the House will recall, a question about game ranching was asked in this House either at the end of January or in the first part of February in our earlier session. At that time, I indicated that I thought it was an important policy issue, and I indicated as well at that time that I would ask the environmental protection advisory committee, which is made up of 19 sectors around and about the province of Alberta who have an interest in our natural resources, to take a look at that issue and to make some recommendations to me. I have not received the recommendations back from that committee, but I understand that that was an item on an agenda at a recent meeting, and I will certainly take those recommendations into account when I receive them.

MR. McINNIS: Well, Mr. Speaker, we would have hoped that the government had learned the result of ramming bad legislation through the House under closure but evidently not.

Well, that committee that the minister referred to has met, and they recommended that the minister refer the matter to the Natural Resources Conservation Board for a public inquiry. Has the minister decided to accede to that request?

3:10

MR. EVANS: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it rather interesting that the member across has heard from an advisory committee whose terms of reference are to report to the Minister of Environmental Protection, and I don't have that report yet. Nonetheless I think it's extremely important that we recognize that we have a committee in place that represents Albertans and that, again, will be making a recommendation back to me. Once I hear from that committee, then I will decide what is best at that time. I'm not going to deal with a hypothetical from the member across about whether or not the NRCB is being suggested, because I say again: I have not had that report back to me.

Foreign Qualifications

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the Minister of Health. With this being Immigration Week, we note that inaction on the part of this government is denying foreign-trained as well as Alberta-trained doctors the opportunity to qualify to practise in our province. Presently doctors are required

to complete two years of postsecondary training in a Canadian or American institution approved by the Medical Council of Canada, but changes to the Medical Profession Act bylaws would allow doctors to complete this training at any institution that's listed in the world health directory. Given that the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons sent these new bylaws to the Ministry of Health more than seven months ago, why has there been no action on this matter?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe I responded earlier this week to this issue on foreign-trained physicians. There still are opportunities for foreign graduates in this province. I've suggested that we have an opportunity for physicians in rural communities, which seems to be our largest issue when it comes to accepting physicians trained in other countries. There are opportunities, and we have to be very conscious of physician supply and mix in this province.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, that didn't sound like an answer to why she doesn't want to act on the bylaws put forward by the college.

I'd like to ask the Deputy Premier a supplementary question then. Given this lack of interest and action on the part of the Ministry of Health and given the government's foot-dragging on the foreign qualifications centre and the outrageous comments of the Minister of Community Development on which we had a petition just yesterday, how can this government expect Albertans to believe that professionally trained immigrants are welcome in this province?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the tradition of Alberta is that Alberta has become home to people from all parts of the world. In fact, a former Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services in the province of Alberta, one of my predecessors, the hon. Mr. Sifton, as I recall, was one of those who opened his arms to all people in the province of Alberta and said to immigrants from all over the world: "Come. Come. We want you. We welcome you. You're a part of our heritage, and you're a part of our culture. We want you to be a very important part of the mosaic of the province of Alberta." That spirit found in the people of this province a hundred years ago remains just as strong in 1993. I want to assure the member that the position of the province of Alberta is that we are home to all of the people of the country and the world. You're looking at an individual who is the child of immigrants. It's been a hard fight for all of us, but as the years have gone by, all of us have found a rightful place in this society. We welcome them. That's the principle of life in the province of Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

Gaming on Reserves

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Deputy Premier in charge of gaming and gambling. As the Deputy Premier well knows, there's a lot of money to be made out of gaming and gambling. The native reserves now are quite interested in participating in the gambling and gaming profits. Now, could the minister share with the House what his plans are for gaming on Indian reserves?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, gaming in Canada is governed by the federal government through the Criminal Code of Canada, yet the administration of that particular Criminal Code is done on

a provincial basis. There are currently a number of initiatives across the country of Canada, particularly in four provinces in Canada, where it seems that the people of the First Nations have chosen to challenge the governing authorities in those various provinces with respect to native gaming.

Here in Alberta we don't have that challenge. We've had ongoing consultations with the leaders of the three treaty areas in the province of Alberta, and I've had consultations on a regular basis along with my colleague the Minister of Justice and my colleague the minister responsible for native affairs. We've asked native leaders in this province, Mr. Speaker, to come back to us and either participate with us, participation of the native people on the Alberta Gaming Commission, or we might set up a task force to look at native gaming in the province of Alberta, or in fact there could be created a native gaming commission. We've said that all three of them are alternatives, and I'm waiting for native leaders from around the province to get back to us with what they would perceive to be the number one initiative that they would want.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Deputy Premier, then, on this very interesting issue. The Native Council of Alberta says that they are in complete charge and answer only to the federal government. Could the Deputy Premier inform the House where he thinks the provincial government's rights are as far as saying what can or cannot take place in gaming on native reserves?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the context in which the hon. member has given the question is one that would lead, I believe, to a confrontation in our society. The native people believe fundamentally that they have total rights on their band lands. The area of gaming is covered by the Criminal Code of Canada, and the federal government believes that it has major jurisdiction in that regard. Under the Criminal Code of Canada administration of that aspect of the Criminal Code has been in essence delegated to the provinces. In those other four provinces I've talked about, they've had challenges that have led to confrontation. The position of our government is to work with the native people to try and find a solution to this very important problem.

I've said to our native leaders that Alberta does not want confrontation with its native people. The native leaders have said to me that they do not want confrontation with the province of Alberta. So we will use the wisdom that the elders in the native community can come up with, we'll use the wisdom that the chiefs in the native community can come up with, and we'll use the wisdom that those of us involved in governance in the province of Alberta can come up with and hopefully find a very amicable solution where there can be peace and harmony and respect for one another.

Government Reorganization

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. I think we all agree with the downsizing of government and amalgamation of services, but there is some concern now about the lack of services being provided. As an example, I got a phone call from one of my constituents saying that he had asked for some information on economic development which there was some delay in providing. So my question is: has the minister now organized his department to avoid delays in services?

MR. SPARROW: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We've been part and parcel of the downsizing. In our department we have the consolidation of tourism, trade, investment, business immigration, forestry development division, small business, industry, science and technology, and the foreign offices. It has caused some confusion, but we are very definitely open for business and have three major thrusts that people should think about: small business and tourism services for individual businesses that want counseling and/or facilitation or project management, a division to deal with each individual business; another division that works with industry sectors called industry, science, and technology, and an ADM that will work with industry sectors – i.e., transportation, manufacturing, or technology – and the third is our marketing division, where we have broken up the world into six regions and have marketing teams that include tourism sales, trade, investment, and immigration sales. So there are three very definite sectors.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister. Thank you. Supplementary.

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Speaker, I'm impressed with the reorganization of services through the department, but my supplementary question is: have we saved any money by doing this?

3:20

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, yes, very definitely we have. We've gone from three ministers' offices to one, from three deputy ministers to one, and from 10 ADMs to six. We've had over 50 people already take early retirement. I'd like to go into the budget side of it. I know that with the savings over the last five years, including this year, we'll be looking at over \$100 million worth of consolidation when we finish the consolidation. Anything more you'll have to watch for in the budget tonight.

Proposed Women's Prison

MR. GESELL: To the government, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the Acting Minister of Justice might answer. The Fort Saskatchewan jail contains an empty housing unit which can accommodate 48 prisoners. This unit was created under a provincial/federal agreement and has been in existence since the jail was built. Has the minister made representation to the federal government to utilize this empty unit rather than build townhouses in Castle Downs for prisoners?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I can say that the hon. Minister of Justice has had two meetings with the Solicitor General of Canada in discussion of the new women's prison in Castle Downs, but I'll take the question as a matter of notice if there's any further information he can add when he returns.

MR. GESELL: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the two attempts that have been made by the minister. In light of the opposition that is in the Castle Downs area against that particular facility, if the motivation by those residents is not sufficient – the Conservative candidates running for election have made representation to the federal minister. Perhaps there needs to be additional strong representation by this government to the federal government. Will the minister make such representation and utilize the available space in the Fort jail rather than build a new facility in an area where it's not wanted for \$10 million . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. [interjection] Thank you, hon. member. Order. [interjection] Order. I know you're

a very keen student of *Beauchesne*. Would you look at the section on supplementary questions? Thank you.

Mr. Minister.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Again I'll take it as a matter of notice for the hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. SPEAKER: Vegreville.

Hospital Utilization

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some time ago the government developed a set of guidelines with respect to single point of entry to ensure that when long-term care beds became available, they would be filled by seniors most in need. I would submit to the hon. minister that based on the experience in my own constituency, these guidelines create a lot of problems for administrators and people on staff in the region who try and implement the guidelines but more particularly for patients and their families, who often see a loved one moved 40, 50, 60 miles away from family, friends, and the communities they helped to build only to find that a bed right next door comes available a day or two later. I would ask the hon. Minister of Health what active review her department is doing to ensure that the guidelines are being changed in ways that make them more sensitive not just to the physical needs of the people who built this province but to the emotional needs as well.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly the issue of long-term care facilities and availability of spaces is one of concern to us. We have indeed a need in a number of communities in this province for more long-term care accommodation, and certainly through the home care program we've been able to respond and keep people in their homes longer.

The guidelines that centre around the single point of entry, which was a recommendation from a very extensive consultation process that culminated in a report given by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, suggested the single point of entry as the best way to ensure co-ordination, consultation, and collaboration in this issue. However, as with any program that is new, it needs to be consistently assessed, and we are doing that and looking at ways it can better meet the needs of our elderly.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Experience, common sense, and even the Mirosh report recommendations indicate that there is a chronic shortage of long-term care beds in certain regions of the province, the northeastern part for example. Addressing those problems would address the concern I expressed. I wonder if the minister will tell us now which facilities in northeastern Alberta, be they in Vegreville, Lamont, Tofield, or wherever, will have the need for additional long-term care beds addressed by this government in the near future.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm working with the communities and with our long-term care committees on that very issue, and it is certainly our desire to meet the needs of our residents in the best way for the residents. I can't give the hon. member the information he would like today but can only assure him that we are working very closely with those communities to look after those long-term needs.

Speaker's Ruling Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: Earlier today the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud requested that his petition be read. That petition will not be read because it is out of order.

Might we revert to the introduction of guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

head: Introduction of Special Guests (reversion)

MR. SPEAKER: First, the Minister of Environmental Protection, followed by the Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. EVANS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 45 young Albertans who are seated in both the public and the members' galleries. These young people are visiting Edmonton this week to take part in the Forum for Young Albertans. Throughout the week the students learn about the different aspects of the Legislative Assembly along with the workings of municipal government and the judiciary. I had the opportunity to participate in an environmental forum with these young people on Wednesday morning, and I know a number of other hon. members in the House have also had an opportunity to meet with the students during the various debates and panels. It's always a pleasure to meet with them and to listen to their concerns. I would certainly like to ask all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly to join with me once we have the young people rise in the galleries to welcome them to the Assembly and to Edmonton.

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, we're fortunate today to have 70-some visitors with us from Whitecourt. They comprise grade 6 students from the Percy Baxter school with their teachers, some parents, and their bus driver. They're seated, I believe, in both galleries. I'd like to have them stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Point of Order Questions to Chairman of a Government Committee

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

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, earlier in question period one of the Liberal caucus asked for permission to talk to the chairman of a committee put together by the government. Under section 405, if I may read, Mr. Speaker, it says:

Questions may be asked of private Members only under strict limitations. Virtually the only question possible would refer to a committee of which the Member is the Chairman.

Now, Mr. Speaker, a couple of years ago we had this fight with you on whether we could address questions to chairmen in the House, and we thought we'd won it. Unfortunately, it's apparently resurrected itself, and you are now using, I gather, the excuse that some chairmen are peripatetic and they move around. For instance, the chairman of Public Accounts is always on this side of the House. So unless a chairman resigns – and we've had no notification of resignation – he is the chairman of the committee no matter where he sits. We can't address a committee. It's

always addressed to some member. Some member is the chairman.

I don't know what carried on; you'll have to examine the Blues. I was able, Mr. Speaker, even with the defective equipment you supply me with, to hear the Premier say: oh, there's where he is. So I'd like you to review why we were not allowed to ask a chairman of a committee a question about the committee.

3:30

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's always a wonderful day and it's always a wonderful opportunity when one gets involved in a debate with the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon. He always brings a very unique approach to the question at hand, but unique is not necessarily right or equated with anything that is right. In this case presumably 405 of *Beauchesne* would be helpful. It would seem to me that when the word "chairman" is identified in *Beauchesne*, which refers to parliamentary rules and forms, the word "chairman" surely must apply to the chairman of a committee that is appointed by the Legislative Assembly. In this case the committee in question has nothing to do with the Legislative Assembly and is very much in question in terms of the recent events of the last several days, if the committee is in fact even in existence.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that this is helpful to you, and certainly if it is not, well, then I'm sure we'll just continue the debate with my old friend from Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair is well aware of the fact that the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon is indeed playing parliamentary games. The *Beauchesne* references do indeed refer to a chairman of a committee of the Legislature, not a chairman of a reasonably minor committee of the government, and that's the reason why the member was not allowed to respond to the question.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that the written questions on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

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

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The matter carries.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung]

3:40

[Eight minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Adair	Horsman	Orman
Ady	Hyland	Paszkowski
Anderson	Isley	Payne
Black	Johnston	Rostad
Bogle	Klein	Schumacher
Bradley	Kowalski	Shrake
Calahasen	Laing, B.	Sparrow
Cardinal	Lund	Tannas
Cherry	Main	Thurber
Clegg	McClellan	Trynchy
Day	McFarland	Weiss
Elzinga	Mirosh	West
Evans	Moore	Woloshyn
Fjordbotten	Musgrove	Zarusky
Gogo	Oldring	

Against the motion:

Barrett	Gesell	McInnis
Bruseker	Gibeault	Mitchell
Chivers	Hawkesworth	Mjolsness
Decore	Hewes	Pashak
Dickson	Laing, M.	Sigurdson
Doyle	MacDonald	Taylor
Fox	McEachern	Wickman
Gagnon		

Totals: For - 44 Against - 22

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Health Care Billing

241. Moved by Mr. Thurber:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to adopt a policy whereby any health care facility or health care provider that bills for payment to Alberta Health on behalf of a client or patient be required to provide a copy of such billing directly to that client or patient.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to bring forward Motion 241. While it's very simple in structure, it's a very important motion to do with the health care system in Alberta. I hope that this whole Legislative Assembly can find it in their hearts to support this, because I think it's very important.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

You will find very few Albertans who will argue that our health system is not the envy of the world. We're constantly used as the standard for comparison for other countries, and I believe we all achieve a certain amount of satisfaction from that. Our citizens in Alberta benefit from cutting-edge technology, miracle drugs, and most importantly competent and caring medical professionals. Unfortunately, we cannot continue to support the system we have come to rely and depend upon. We are in a new economic era, one which emphasizes fiscal restraint and responsibility. We have all felt the pinch, and our health care system cannot be an exception. It is interesting to note, however, that it is not simply rising costs, inflation, or population that have created this predicament. In fact, overall prices have only risen by 5.5 percent and our population only by 1 percent. Our problem stems from the

fact that health care spending over the past 12 years has risen on an average of 15 percent per year.

So the question becomes: what are the primary reasons for this increase in health expenditures? What has happened so that our budget for Health has gone from 20 percent of the total in 1980 to nearly 30 percent in 1992, a 12-year period? We can point our fingers at the federal government, Mr. Speaker, and state that federal transfer payments have been dramatically reduced and that impacts on the problem. This would be correct. In fact, in 1979-1980 alone the federal government reduced its contribution through the EPF by 20 percent. That was in one hit alone. You can also say that provincial revenues have fallen over the years and all we need is a return to \$30 a barrel oil prices to fix our problems. That again would be illusionary and wishful thinking.

However, rather than pointing fingers, I think we would be better served by looking at a problem we can address: the use of the system by Albertans. Alberta Health's financial expenditures were \$3.9 billion for the '91-92 year, and out of this total over \$900 million went to provide funding for basic health services. In '90-91 this figure was \$853 million. This represents a \$50 million increase over the span of one year, but, Mr. Speaker, this was not simply a one-time occurrence. From '89-90 to '90-91 we witnessed an increase of 6.5 percent, and the year before it was over 10 percent, and it goes on and on and on.

There are numerous other indicators that the use of our system has increased dramatically over the years. Each year more and more Albertans are covered under the Alberta health care insurance plan. In fact, over the past three or four years we have added more than 170,000 people to the plan, and there's no reason to expect that this will not continue. We have also witnessed an increase in the average expenditure per person for basic health services. It rose 8.5 percent in '89-90 and 4.8 percent in '90-91. Essentially, Alberta's patients are costing the system more and more per person, and one has to wonder at what point this will stop.

There are no instant solutions, Mr. Speaker. Cutting ruthlessly, reducing access to care, and closing down much-needed facilities in rural or urban Alberta are not the answer. What we need to do is educate. We need to tell Albertans that their actions do indeed have repercussions or reactions, that we are responsible and accountable. I am not alone in this assertion. In fact, this is the same conclusion that the Premier's Commission on Future Health Care for Albertans arrived at. The Rainbow Report reaffirmed our belief that people are the key to our health care system. The messages received by the commission centred on the idea that Albertans are willing to accept greater responsibility and that we as individuals want more control over our health care decisions.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that The Rainbow Report put it best when it stated:

People, when armed with resources and knowledge, can control and be responsible for personal and family health and health care decisions.

That is exactly what this motion tries to do. Most people do not fully understand what a visit costs the taxpayer. They hear stories regarding the financial state of our health care system, but I don't think it has hit home yet that it is our decisions and choices as health consumers that have the greatest impact.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, by requiring that health care practitioners provide a copy of the bill to the patient, we are informing and educating consumers. You don't go to the grocery store and put items into the cart regardless of price. You shop and compare and decide if the purchase is really worth the money. Why can't we apply the

same principle to health care? It makes common sense, and it should be done.

I believe it is for this reason that The Rainbow Report made recommendation 4.2:

That information on the costs of services rendered by practitioners, institutions or government agencies be provided to individuals.

The report goes on to say that

we must ensure that we possess a level of knowledge sufficient to allow us to use the health care system wisely and responsibly.

Motion 241 can be viewed as a response to that recommendation.

It is interesting to note that while the commission was touring the province of Alberta and soliciting the views of Albertans, it became clear that there was very little knowledge at the consumer level regarding the actual costs of health care. This was in direct contrast to the knowledge of costs and services that we pay for directly in other sectors. I believe the key word here is "direct." It seems that health services, even though they constitute one of the greater expenses in our province, are not subject to the same scrutiny as other items that we buy. This is a curious double standard, and I think this motion before us would address that shortcoming.

The Rainbow Report came to a similar conclusion, and I think it is beneficial to quote from the final report, which says:

It would appear the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan acts as a shield against the reality of how expensive medical and hospital services are, and that the majority of the funds come, not from premiums, but from taxes. With more detailed information, consumers might be more [careful] in their use of services and less demanding on the system.

When we listen to this statement, we must keep in mind the source of these words. These suggestions and ideas came from Albertans in a number of forums all around this province; they're not from a professor living in an ivory tower.

It becomes even more apparent that I am not alone in advocating this idea when you consider a statement made by the Alberta Society of the Friends of Medicare. They believe and have stated that it is a responsibility of citizens to have an understanding of the funds that are being spent on our behalf. The Friends of Medicare see a need for Albertans being provided with statements on their individual health care costs and being required to sign acknowledgements of services as a control and education measure.

I would also like to mention that Alberta is not the only province that has played with the concept of cost-awareness programs. A hospital in Toronto was the subject of a pilot program in the past little while. Patients were provided with a copy of their bill in order to give them a better understanding of the costs associated with a hospital stay. It seems that Ontario has had a similar problem regarding awareness of health costs, and they are taking steps to address this, as we should.

I think one of the greatest and most common misconceptions is that health services are free or that premiums go a long way in covering the costs. In fact, Mr. Speaker, premiums only raised about 27 percent of the \$1 billion expenditure for health care insurance. In essence, this means that health care is a social program that is funded by the taxpayers such as you and I.

The Rainbow Report went on and it made this clear when it calculated that a family earning \$50,000 a year paid an estimated \$2,000 in health care premiums through taxes. If we keep this in mind every time we visit the doctor and each time we look at the bill we receive from our physician, I believe many of us would think twice about the care we are receiving. I'm not inferring that all Albertans abuse the health care system. It is just that we have become accustomed to visiting the doctor without having to consider the consequences. We've been buying blind for far too

long. It's like having a credit card. You get no bill, and you don't have to worry about the consequences of what it's costing.

This isn't just a view of myself, Mr. Speaker. This is even the view of hundreds of doctors in a survey conducted in April for the Harvard School of Public Health. In that study Canadian physicians said that overuse of services by patients was their biggest problem, ranking far ahead of access to special services and facilities.

The issue of overuse was also recently investigated by Dr. Howard Platt who published his findings in the Alberta Doctors' Digest, an Alberta Medical Association publication which goes out to 4,000 doctors in this province. Dr. Platt's findings showed that in one particular area of southern Alberta 44 percent of the children under the age of 10 were taken to their doctors for common colds. When one considers that it costs Alberta Health about \$25 a patient per visit for colds, this translates into a considerable expenditure. In fact, Dr. Platt's findings showed that during the fall and winter Alberta doctors billed for more than \$6 million for visits relating to colds. When most of us were growing up in rural Alberta, it was always a saying there that if you had a cold and went to the doctor and had it treated, it would go away in seven days. If you didn't treat it, it would go away in one week. I think this has a lot of merit when you're talking about \$6 million.

I find some of these facts somewhat alarming, but where do you put the blame, Mr. Speaker? It's not the fault of the doctors who are simply treating those people who walk through the door. Rather, the onus should be on the individuals who use the service; make them responsible. Perhaps one of the reasons for the frequency of visits is that many are unaware of what they are costing the system. I believe awareness could go a long way to remedying this problem, and that's my intent with this motion.

I realize that having a doctor provide a copy of the billing to the patient may not be a welcome intrusion into his or her practice. I understand that some would view this as needless paperwork or something that increases overhead expenses. I don't discount those concerns. However, I believe it would be a small sacrifice on behalf of our health care practitioners to promote greater awareness of health care costs in Alberta.

I sincerely hope that our province will continue to be able to provide the level of service that it has in the past, but if we continue to spend the \$11 million a day that we are spending right now, I doubt that this will be possible. I think awareness of the cost of this system has to be available to the public, and it will go a great way in solving some of this. We have to act now to increase the level of awareness regarding the cost of health care in Alberta. This will be a combined effort. We have a budget coming down here tonight where we're all going to have to tighten up, and we need to make people aware of what the taxpayers are paying on their behalf. We all have a role to play in getting our health spending under control: doctors, patients, and those of us who sit in this Legislature.

It is for this reason that I ask for your support for Motion 241, Mr. Speaker, and I urge all members to support this.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an intriguing motion. While it's flawed in its specifics, it deals with an important concept in its principle, and that is the concept of accountability. It wasn't so long ago, actually, that the Alberta health care insurance system would send to all members of the Alberta health care plan a statement every six months which

itemized each visit to a physician or whoever it is that is allowed to bill the health care system. It isn't always specifically physicians. It would spell out the day on which the visit happened, the nature of the service, and the amount that the health care insurance system was billed. The purpose was twofold. One was to let health care consumers know what their cost to the system was, and the other was an accountability. If you didn't see a physician on a certain date, you'd be able to phone up and say: "Uh, uh. That's an incorrect billing. I didn't see a physician on such and such a date."

4:00

Now, that system was abandoned I think because the health care minister said that it was costing too much to do that. That's too bad. What the member is proposing in his motion is going to cost as well; it is. Whether it's costing the hospital, the health clinic, the physician, the chiropractor, someone's going to have to pick up that cost.

So let's deal with the problem that the motion attempts to address: patient abuse. We know that it's not common; it's estimated to be under 3 percent. Just like the abuse of the social services system, it's hard to pin down. I want to ask you: who abuses the system? Not to put too fine a point on it: people who think that they're sick when they aren't abuse the system, but they themselves have an illness called hypochondria which needs to be treated. The other people who abuse the system are health care professionals – physicians, chiropractors, what have you – who call you back unnecessarily. I as the health care spokesperson for the New Democrat caucus for the last couple of years have encountered many, many people who tell me that if the doc hadn't called them back, they wouldn't have gone back. I think that's really important.

When I go to see my doctor – the best doctor in the world, by the way – I show her whatever the problem is. She tells me how she thinks she can fix it, and I say: "Fine. If I figure it's fixed to the point where I'm returned to my state of health prior to the problem having developed, I won't phone you." That's the deal. Brenda doesn't call me, and I don't call her. There is no automatic callback. I think my doctor is very honourable.

I can also tell you that I have dealt with doctors in the past – not for very long, though; I've only had two physicians the whole time I've been an adult – who've said, "I want you to come back," and I thought: Uh uh, that's a rip-off; I'm not going for that. I've been in the health care insurance plan for I think 23 years – yeah, 23 years – and in all that time I had one doctor for 10 years and another doctor for 10 years and in the interim years saw a couple that I didn't like because they wanted to call me back when I thought it was unnecessary.

So I don't think we should just blame the users of the system. I think that we need to look at a bunch of recommendations, some of which emanated from the Hyndman report, a lot of which emanated from the New Democrat caucus, to take a much larger approach to reconstructing our health care system. I think we could save a lot of money right now, right off the top – well, I know we could – by converting small, underutilized rural hospitals into multi-use health care facilities. I know that we can save a lot of money by sponsoring regionalization of hospital and health care service delivery. I know that we can save a lot of money if in rural areas – now, I do mean areas and not specific towns – we can have roving services delivered by health care professionals. I know that we can save a lot of money by sponsoring more and more home care. I know that we can save money by telling the feds that their brand-name drug legislation is

costing us throughout Canada \$500 million unnecessarily. I know that we could save money by promoting the use of generic drugs.

If we took a comprehensive approach, which was suggested by the Hyndman commission, we stand to save 10, 15, 20 percent off the bill. I think we can save a lot more money by doing that than by asking every individual health care provider who currently has the ability to bill the system on a fee-for-service basis to provide a copy of the bill to the client. I'm afraid that some clients might start to feel guilty.

I'll give you a perfect example, Mr. Speaker. I didn't use to talk about it in this Assembly; I don't think I did anyway. But I will now. For a year in my life I was a daily visitor to the Cross cancer hospital. Every single day my life consisted of – I'm not sure in which order – eating, sleeping, throwing up, and getting radiotherapy. It was not a fun time. Now, if every day the miracle man who saved my life had handed me a bill, I would have felt guilty. I would have felt like: "Well, no, I shouldn't be here. It's costing Alberta health care a lot of money because I have to go and have this radiotherapy, I have to have blood tests every day." They have to almost kill you to save you when you get to a certain point in a cancer diagnosis, which is where I was at. I would have felt really guilty.

I'll bet you the former transportation minister would have felt bad, as well, to mention one. There are a whole number of people in here who have had to use the system for quite a while. You know, when you've got a serious illness, the last thing in the world you need is to start feeling guilty because you're costing the system. What you need is reinforcement. You need hope, because when you're told you're going to die, there's only one thing ultimately, despite the Dr. McGowans of the world – and they're pretty wonderful – you've got to believe that you can live; you've got to have hope that you can live. If somebody's handing you a bill every day saying that it costs 50 bucks to give you the radiotherapy and 10 bucks to do your blood test today, and you do this for a year – I mean, I didn't ask for Hodgkin's disease. You know, it happens. It's happening to Mario Lemieux. It happens for no apparent reason. Well, actually there is an apparent reason: it's assumed nowadays that it's the result of what used to be considered a self-limiting cancer, which is – oh, Lord, I can't remember the name of it anyway.

You want people to start losing hope? Well, I'll tell you, the fastest way for them to lose hope is to start handing them a bill everyday. If they lose hope, they lose their productivity: they don't come back into society to work. I don't want to say any names, but you know the member that I'm looking at right now. I mean, I'm sure that hope was a really important factor in his survival. It certainly was in mine. We're back working because of that hope. We're back working and contributing to society and paying taxes, lot's of them, because we had hope and because the medical system was there to serve us and to make sure that we got back on our feet. That's how it works for most people. So I would not want to see a deterrent that would affect people that were and are in my situation or anybody else.

Now, if there are people who are going to the doctor for a cold, I can tell the member sponsoring this motion that there are other ways to deal with this issue. One is a public education campaign. The Alberta Medical Association is about to launch its latest in the campaign. I'm being visited in a few weeks by the AMA and by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. You know, they're the ones that are actively taking part in helping correct what's wrong with our medicare system. Government isn't doing anything, as far as I can see, except for allowing two-tiered medicare, getting us on the slippery slope of privatized medicare.

Now, if you want to save money, there are lots of ways of doing it, and you don't have to be unfair in the way that you do it. Let me give you an example. We currently have magnetic resonance imaging equipment in Alberta. Some is owned by the public health care system, a couple of major hospitals, and now a couple are owned by private, for-profit interests. Now, I say to you, as I said today in question period: you think that this competition may be healthy; I say it's not. It wouldn't be allowed in some other provinces, and I'll tell you why: because the people who have got the \$800 or a thousand dollars to go to the private MRI lab to have their diagnosis done are then going to walk back to the public system and say: "I've got my diagnosis. I've got X, Y, or Z problem. Get me into the hospital, doctor. I need to get it fixed." Meanwhile, the person who waited for the public health care system MRI has to wait several weeks longer, gets diagnosed several weeks later, and doesn't get back to their doc as fast as the person who had the 800 or thousand bucks. Well, guess what? Their ability to get into the hospital to have their problem corrected is going to be delayed by that much. That's not fair. That's not right.

If you want to correct the health care system, look at the New Democrat policies – that's all you have to do – and implement them.

I should say, Mr. Speaker, in closing, that when we form the government, that is exactly what we are going to do.

Ta ta.

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

4:10

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion that we have before us today is, as I see it, a repeat of one that was introduced in 1991 by the Member for Dunvegan. It seems as though we're simply rehashing old material here. I'm of the view that health care costs can and will be contained, but this is not the way. I can't support this motion. I think our health care institutions and our many programs, private and nonprofit, are being very creative in finding new networks and developing outreach programs. Unfortunately they're not being rewarded yet for the kinds of activities that they are performing.

Mr. Speaker, I wish the Member for Drayton Valley had been clearer in telling us what his objective is in bringing the motion forward at this time. I'm not sure what it is he hopes to achieve. Is it to stop the use of the health care system? He's spoken of overuse, but is it to stop just general use? Is it to save money? Is it to educate people on the costs, and if so, why? So they have a better understanding? Well, that's fine, but what's the outcome from that? I don't know, having listened to it, whether the member really believes that the exercise would curb the demands on the health care system, and I'm not sure that he has any information about so-called abuse of the system in any event. He certainly didn't speak to that. There's little evidence that tells us what, if any, the abuse is. I don't know whether the member has any data from studies that show that people who are made aware of their health care costs would subsequently cut back on seeking treatment. I certainly know of none; in fact, on the contrary.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask members to think about what occurs – and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has spoken of this – when people who have persistent chronic illnesses are able to stay at work and stay supportive of their families and stay paying taxes because they are able to access health care. What about disabled people in the same position? People with large families, a lot of children? Children, you know, grow up; their health care demands

diminish as they get older. What about people who are made, by this kind of a move, to feel threatened and would not access the health care system, thereby leaving it too late and then costing us far more? The member didn't seem to take any of those things into consideration, and I ask once again: what evidence is there that this would work?

Some years ago, I'm aware, Mr. Speaker, of a number of experiments. A number of doctors in clinics in Red Deer attempted to do just this as part of a pilot project of the department, and it was called: the bill you don't see. Now, results from that study show that most of the doctors pulled out before the project was finished. All they achieved was to create extra work for the janitorial service, because they had to pick up all the receipts off the floor. They realized very quickly that it wasn't accomplishing anything and was in fact wasting their time. Even the health care insurance division dropped their practice of sending out annual information bills because they found information did nothing to change behaviour. That's the key to this whole notion of this project that the member's suggesting. We have to show success by showing a change in behaviour, and I don't believe there's any evidence that this will occur. A number of years ago, a decade or so ago, the Saskatchewan experiment showed just the reverse. It didn't do anything to change behaviour.

When I first came into this House in 1986, the minister of health, Mr. Marvin Moore, was very concerned about overuse, so he got involved in quite an expensive and sophisticated television program to help people understand how much their health care was costing and therefore hopefully get them to reduce their demands. It didn't work, and he very quickly discontinued the television series because it wasn't having any impact.

Mr. Speaker, I think that there are many Albertans that would like to know what the true cost of their treatment is, and they should be told. In fact, if you call health care insurance, you can find out. This is not a mystery. If you want to know, certainly you can find out. I think a simpler method would be simply to have an 800 number that you can call if you want to know, because I don't find any evidence, any empirical data that tells me that this kind of move would save costs.

I think most Albertans are very responsible folks. The member says that they would think twice. Well, I think most Albertans don't rush to the doctor. I suppose a few among us are hypochondriacs but not too many. The Member for Vegreville isn't a hypochondriac. I don't believe it occurs very often. Not too long ago I was at a meeting with a hospital board, Mr. Speaker, in a smaller centre in Alberta, and someone at the board said something about abuse. There were perhaps 20, 22 people in the room. I said, "Does anybody here know five people that abuse the system?" Nobody knew. This is a hospital board, professionals in the business, and so on. So I said, "Well, does anybody in the room know one person that abuses the system?" One person put his hand up, a doctor, and he said, "I know somebody that's been to the doctor 42 times, and it was unnecessary." I said, "Well, wouldn't you think that the doctor would have told him so?"

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of factors here. It's not as simple as sending out a piece of paper once a month or once a quarter to say, "Here's what you've used up." That's not going to stop me if I've got an emergency. That's not going to stop any one of us if we have an emergency in our family from going and accessing the health care system. We all pay for it. The notion seems to be present that this is the government's money. This is taxpayers' money. I find wherever I go that taxpayers are prepared to pay for a quality, accessible health care system. They're not happy about paying more and getting less, but they're certainly prepared to pay for it, and it's one thing that they want

protected and nourished. They don't want anything that will be intrusive in their access to that system.

Mr. Speaker, what the member's motion sets out to do is, in my view, create another level of paper pushing for health care professionals, and they really have far better things to do. Perhaps the member can tell us if he has some idea of what the project would cost and what, if any, the recovery would be anticipated to be.

I think this motion reflects the government's tired, old belief that it's the consumers that are to blame for the rising costs of care. We all know that the system has grown away from itself. It's grown to be redundant, not because it was so improperly designed in the first place but because it's now out of date and out of step with modern technology. Mr. Speaker, the system has become irrational. I believe Albertans are thoughtful and conscientious citizens and few want to use a health care facility or visit a health care worker unless it's absolutely necessary. In fact, we probably err on the side of waiting too long. Further, I don't think any amount of billing notice is going to prevent someone from seeking help when it's needed, nor do we ever want to become a province that would prevent or discourage people from getting treatment because they have spent, so-called, too much already. That's what I think this motion suggests to us.

Mr. Speaker, I get a little resentful at the government's suggestion that Albertans don't appreciate our system, that we should be more accountable, and that we don't appreciate it because it's not free, that if we knew what it costs . . . Well, my submission is that Albertans do know what health care costs. We pay through the system, through premiums and our taxes, but the government is not providing a free health care system out of generosity.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Drayton Valley spoke to this motion in 1991, and he suggests that this motion is in keeping with Albertans' requests for information on how their tax dollars are spent. Well, it's curious to me that we want to give Albertans information on how much they're overspending, so to speak, on health care, but we don't want to give them information on how much the government is overspending on NovAtel or Gainers. That information isn't available, but we want to provide them with upfront information on how presumably reckless they are being with the health care system. I think, Mr. Speaker, that we have ample evidence that this kind of thing wouldn't work, doesn't work, hasn't worked. The problem with health care is that it's an irrational system that needs reform. I've spoken to that many times.

4:20

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans – whether they are professional people in the health care system, whether they are boards of institutions, whether they are doctors, the AMA, the college of physicians, consumers, whether they are in small centres, in isolated communities, or in large centres – are already understanding the need for reform. That reform is driven not only by the costs, but it's also driven by the new technology, both medical engineering and drug technology, and by a different understanding of life-style, healthy communities, and healthy workplaces. I just wish the government would stop talking about things of this kind that have been proved not workable and start listening and acting to reinforce what Albertans not just already know but what Albertans are already acting on.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, this is not a useful move. This isn't going to ensure healthy people or reduced costs, and I won't support it.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater-Andrew.

MR. ZARUSKY: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on this motion, a good motion, by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley. I think it's very important to know what is being spent on health in this province. We know overall what's being spent, but we certainly don't know the finer details of it. There are many ways in which people can be educated and made aware of what the costs are. Every person is in a different situation when you visit a doctor, a physician, or don't visit him. I tell you that I'm one of the fortunate ones. If I see a doctor once a year, probably that's about all. So if everybody were like me, I guess we wouldn't have any problems at all. But then there are people that need it, and that's got to be appreciated. I certainly am willing to put my share into the system to make sure that health care is there when it's needed. That's what I'm sure most Albertans will agree with.

Mr. Speaker, I guess other members have spoken on it. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley indeed gave a lot of support to this motion of sending something to people and making them aware, educating them on what the total costs are of their visits to a doctor, to a hospital, whether it be an operation or just a normal visit.

It's unfortunate that the members of the opposition have all kinds of different ideas. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands certainly seemed like she was running around all over the place. She agreed to it from the start, that it's a wise thing, but then went on to indicate that when the need gets there, people will get guilty. Well, I don't think people should get guilty when the need is there to get yourself or your family's health looked after. That's not at all what's in this motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands certainly went through some probably rough times, and we all agree that we wish her good health and happiness in the future and hope it doesn't occur again. I'm sure she'd like to know what the costs were of those visits or future visits, if they are needed.

Then we've got the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

AN HON. MEMBER: Gold Bar.

MR. ZARUSKY: Is it? Oh, sorry. Gold Bar. Well, are they close, Meadowlark and Gold Bar?

AN HON. MEMBER: Opposite sides of the city.

MR. ZARUSKY: Opposite sides of the city. Well, thank you, member. I will remember that.

Anyways, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, certainly a person that I know would not abuse any system and work for the good of all mankind, indicated that doctors and people in the province certainly can be trusted. At the same time, the Liberals have come up with some great ideas on how to save health care costs and make people aware of how it can be done. I agree with the Member for Drayton Valley that this is just a small way of educating. The Liberals have got their great ideas, and I gather they'd save money on the backs of all rural Albertans and actually make us suffer and shut down all the hospitals in the rinky-dinky towns. That's part of their savings to our health care, begrudging my family and myself health care in my community of Smoky Lake. They'd shut the hospital down there.

This actually would save costs to the health care system: making people aware of the costs of it, whether through a statement, as was sent out in the past. It certainly helped me, anyway, helped my family. We got a printout on how much it cost and how many times we were at a doctor's for a visit, whether it was my wife or my children or others. There were

times, maybe some mistake or some cross reference of records or receipts in the doctor's office, when there might have been a billing on there that actually the person didn't visit, but I'm sure it was just an oversight. This is what people wanted to see: if in fact they did visit, the day, the time, and whatever the case of the visit was. It was appreciated.

[Mr. Main in the Chair]

Getting back to some of the needs for this, I've had many of my constituents come up to me and ask for this statement, saying, "Whatever happened to that statement that used to come?" Even senior citizens are saying this. They have come to me and said, "Well, I'd like a printout to see when I went and what the reason was for it and the cost of it, the charge for it." So you can see, Mr. Speaker, that these people want it.

I guess another thing that's been indicated is a thing called a smart card. Every individual has a card with a number on it like Visa and gas cards and many others. Every time you go in there, it's run through a system and you sign it. You know you were there. You get a copy of it. You know the cost at the time, and you know what the visit was about. That's one way of doing it.

There was a strong indication in The Rainbow Report of making people aware of what the costs are and what they're doing. Actually, Mr. Speaker, no matter what you're doing, if something is presumed free – someplace along the way you're paying a premium for this; it doesn't come directly – eventually you take it for granted that it's just there because it's there.

If we're going to have the health care we deserve in this province – and our government certainly supports that all people have access to the best health care in the world, as we've had in the past – we have to get a handle on it. These are some of the things that people are telling us: tell us how much this costs in fine detail; tell us how much the visit to the doctor that I went to yesterday cost. Naturally, there are many times when maybe you have a headache or some other ailment that might feel like it's really bad, but if you wait till the next morning, usually it goes away. If you have to pay for it or know what it in fact does cost . . .

Mr. Speaker, I think there are many reasons for this motion. It's a motion that should be supported by every member in this Legislature. I know that our government and myself strongly support this motion of the hon. Member for Drayton Valley.

Mr. Speaker, in view of the hour I move that we adjourn debate.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Redwater-Andrew has moved the debate be adjourned. Because of Standing Orders 8(3) the motion does not need to be voted on because time has expired. This is a perfect confluence of events.

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

4:30

**Bill 221
Government Open Contract Act**

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. FOX: Question.

MR. BRUSEKER: There's no question this is a great Bill. I agree. Thank you, Member for Vegreville.

Mr. Speaker, the Government Open Contract Act, particularly on the day of the budget, to come down later this evening, I'm sure will be accepted by the government as a means of the government to operate more effectively and efficiently, which of course we hear from all government members is a goal of the government in streamlining costs and reducing our annual deficits and ultimately to tackle the debt.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill is quite short, only a couple of pages long. I'd simply like to go through, first of all, what it is the Bill proposes to do, then secondly, to explain why it is that we want to do this, and then thirdly, to explain some of the reasons that have led to the necessity of this Bill coming forward.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill has five sections to it. The Bill simply says that no contract is going to be finalized before an open contract, an open tendering process has occurred. Advertisements would occur in daily and weekly newspapers across the province, and these bids would then be received by the hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, who I see hanging on my every word and I'm sure will take every bit of advice to heart for future use in the government.

Mr. Speaker, the figure that is employed in the Bill is \$50,000. Of course, it is difficult for the government to predict whether a contract is going to come in just under or just over, and so the wording has been crafted in such a fashion that it says, "which is or is likely to be of a value of \$50,000 or more." Really, it sets a target, and I'm sure that in most cases when the government proposes to let a contract or call for bids on a contract, the government should have a reasonable idea ahead of time whether it's going to be over or under the \$50,000 mark.

Mr. Speaker, if the negotiations bid with expectations being less than \$50,000 and it goes over that amount, the minister will publish the details of the bids, regardless of the amounts, so the public is aware of the bids that have been received and what has been bid on, whatever the contract is.

Section 2 requires that "the Minister shall publish guidelines for the tendering of contracts" in terms of interested parties being able to contract or negotiate with the Crown and the reasons for his actions. Then, finally, all bids will be published by the Crown; in other words, not just the successful bidder and not just the lowest or the highest, depending upon the way it goes – in this case the highest bid – but the name of each bidder and the amount of the bid so in fact people can see what has been bid on each different contract.

Now, Mr. Speaker, a number of departments do follow some of this process in terms of tendering of contracts. I note with many of the announcements made from the Department of Transportation and Utilities, for example, with respect to road paving contracts, that there's often a statement to the effect that the ABC road company was offered a contract for a certain number of dollars, and the next successful bid was – and then an appropriate figure was given. So although it does happen to a certain extent, it clearly doesn't happen all the time.

Mr. Speaker, what we're proposing here is an open hearing committee system. What we're looking for is obviously some representation from members of the House, an all-party committee, to look at tenders being received and also, of course, senior department officials with the appropriate department that is proposing to let this contract go. The reason for that open committee system – I've partaken of a number of all-party committees – is that when you get all-party committee representation, it does allow for open discussion to occur. The results are not always necessarily what one would like, but at least a discussion occurs equally amongst all members and all members are aware of what's going on. It then also provides the public

with the information that is required for them to be able to tender it, in terms of details of the contract, in terms of expertise required, and so forth. Ultimately, of course, when a contract is let to a particular contractor, what ends up happening is that the reasons why a particular contractor has been chosen over others are made clear to the public. In other words, the reason why other tenders were not chosen is made public.

The advantages of that, Mr. Speaker, should be apparent to all members. Patronage and favouritism go out the window. Whether they are in fact in place or not, as the government likes to claim, it eliminates the possibility, because when you have an open contract process as proposed under this Bill, then any patronage and favouritism cannot continue to occur.

It creates certainty for the tenderers in terms of how the contracts are awarded, the idea that there is fairness in the tendering process. Finally, and I think it's perhaps the most important reason, Mr. Speaker, the public – whether it's the public of Alberta, the public of a city or municipality, or the public of the nation – is expecting and demanding accountability from their governments. What this would do, then, by making sure all this occurs – and you'll notice it's right in the title of the Bill, the Government Open, and that's the key word, Contract Act – is that it ensures the information is available to the public. Knowing how the government now has embraced the concept of access to information, I'm sure an open contract process will be equally endearing to their hearts.

Let I simply dwell on the negative, I think the government has made some positive steps. The WPIN, the western purchasing information network, that has been instituted by the government I think is a good step in the right direction. [some applause] It should be applauded, hon. member; I agree. It's a good step in the right direction. It's a good step because it works to reduce one of the biggest problems, which we've seen many, many times. I'm sure hon. members have seen in the papers before: barriers to interprovincial trade. Well, the WPIN proposes to reduce and ultimately eliminate interprovincial trade barriers. That's a good step in the right direction, but it still allows the government to privately choose behind closed doors who it is that's going to get a contract or not get a contract. That, Mr. Speaker, is a problem, as I referred to earlier on: the concept of accountability to the public, the accountability to Albertans at large. What we have now is decisions made in private, and then we do see, in some cases, an announcement from the government: Contract was let to so-and-so company for such-and-such an amount. But that's an after-the-fact process. What I'm proposing here in this Bill is something that happens in advance.

Ultimately, the minister or the department that is going to make a decision doesn't have to accept the lowest or any tender in particular; they can select whomever it is they wish. That again allows for the charge of patronage or favouritism or call it what you will to occur. If we have an open process, Mr. Speaker, that eliminates that possibility.

Finally, the current process we have now allows for the minister to release some or all or none of the information we have. This Bill, the Government Open Contract Act, would put forward all the information and make it available to the public, and I think that's what the public is asking for. There's a new mood in the public out there. I think it started, Mr. Speaker, in part because of the referendum, where recently, in October of 1992, we of course had a referendum, and Canadians and Albertans got involved with the process. I think they found that an exciting process and want to have that continued involvement.

Let me go on now to some of the reasons I'm proposing Bill 221, some of the positives and some of the negatives that have

happened in the past. I want to just think back to a couple of contracts that have been let that I think have not done any favours to the government in terms of things that have occurred. IBM and CGI are a couple of contracts that were let for the purchase of government computer system equipment. IBM and CGI received a contract to provide computer systems. In fact, there were a number of other contracts that were lower than this particular bid. The obvious question then is: why did IBM and CGI get the contract? Under Bill 221 we would be looking for a better deal. The hon. Treasurer at that time, the Member for Lethbridge-East, was quite sure that the process was fair, that everything was aboveboard. However, again the decision was made behind closed doors.

4:40

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View raised questions here in question period about that very Bill. This quote is from the May 11, 1992, *Hansard*. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East says:

We have found the following: that it was a fair and equitable tendering process.

Again on that same issue, from May 11, the hon. former Treasurer, the Member for Lethbridge-East:

I think . . . the tendering process of the government of Alberta has been without reproach. The process [is] open and fair.

And later on:

I am satisfied, along with my colleagues in cabinet, that the process was one of fairness, was one of objectivity, was one of openness, and was one of pure competition.

Those are all from the May 11, 1992, *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, yet all of those decisions occurred behind closed doors.

The government awarded a contract for \$1.6 million to IBM and CGI, yet there were other bids for similar equipment that would do the same thing, and the bids ranged from a low of \$545,000 to a high of \$720,000. In effect, we could have got the same materiel, the same equipment, for the government for a million dollars less.

Mr. Speaker, if we can save a million dollars here and a million dollars there, pretty soon you've got some real money, like a billion or two, and that's how we ended up in some deficit positions that we've got right now.

I want to go on to another example of one of the problems we've had with not having a Bill like Bill 221 before us: the North West Trust Company contract. Mr. Speaker, only a year ago we had a huge problem with NovAtel. It was in the newspapers many times. Now all Albertans are familiar with it. On May 29, 1992, North West Trust Company was given the responsibility to manage NovAtel's loan portfolio. Now, there's nothing wrong with that by itself except – except – that there was no tendering process. The decision was made in cabinet: go to one company. That was it. No choices, no contract, no tendering. Simply supply it.

Under the terms of the management agreement North West Trust was to look after four different companies: NovAtel Finance, Systems Finance, Cellular Finance, and 496072 Alberta Ltd. North West Trust was given a broad scope of activities, of authority to negotiate, settle the terms, restructure any outstanding loans, fulfill loan commitments, advance moneys, make new loans – they're supposed to be collecting loans, by the way, Mr. Speaker – supervise the collection of loans and accounts receivable, and manage, operate, and sell land and buildings and get what they could for it.

North West Trust agreed to collect or at least attempt to collect on the NovAtel loans. When I raised the question in question

period the other day – and recall, Mr. Speaker, that I said this occurred on May 29. Here we are now on May 6, 1993. Almost a full year later the Treasurer still doesn't know what, if anything, has been collected on these loans. A private deal behind closed doors with one company, and we in the public still don't know what's going on. This has so far cost taxpayers \$3.3 million, and the Treasurer doesn't know what we've got for our \$3.3 million.

Now, typically what happens, Mr. Speaker, is that most collection agencies work on a percentage basis. If they collect a dollar, they get 10 percent of that dollar. They get 10 cents, maybe 15 cents on the dollar. What we have done here is we agreed ahead of time: that \$3.3 million bucks – go out there, North West Trust; do the best you can and let us know how it turns out. Apparently they haven't even told the Treasurer yet how it has turned out, because he doesn't know if anything's been collected.

Now, North West Trust is going to get an asset management fee – here's the deal, Mr. Speaker, and here's why this is such a problem – of 1.5 percent per annum of the gross assets being managed until May 31, 1993. So just to the end of this month we're in; thereafter the fee is going to be 1.25 percent. Now, this is 1 and a half percent on \$210 million. That's a fair chunk of money. It doesn't say anything about how much they've got to collect. It doesn't say that it's a percentage or a commission rate. It simply says that this is what they're going to get. In addition to that, North West Trust will also be paid a collection fee equal to .75, three-quarters of a percent, of the cash income from the principal on the loans receivable. So on top of the management fee, they're also going to get a collection fee for whatever they collect on the \$208 million. In addition to that, they're going to get reimbursed for third-party expenses. Now, Mr. Speaker, that's a fair chunk of money. I submit that if a contract or a tender call had gone out and said, "Who out there can collect on this \$208 million?" we probably could have got more collections for less money than by simply going to one company that had been created by this government and saying, "You guys have got the job." That's another problem.

Olympia & York. I would be remiss if I left Olympia & York off the discussion of improper contract letting. This is a little bit of history now, Mr. Speaker, but again it highlights the same government, of course. On April 2, 1987, the government of Alberta made a commitment to lease approximately 400,000 square feet of office space in an office tower development proposed by Olympia & York, O & Y. The lease was to be effective in January of 1990. John Shepherd* was the vice-president at the time. It was a \$165 million office tower which at that time, the vice-president John Shepherd said, would never have gone ahead – would never have gone ahead – without the commitment from the government. Well, it's nice for government to support local businesses, but that's not the whole story.

You see, what happened was that there was no public tender call again. The government sat down with the people from Olympia & York and said, "We'd like to rent some space from you." The guys at Olympia & York said, "We'd love to rent you some space." So the government agreed to rent office space for 20 years if O & Y built their building, and they agreed to pay \$22.86 per square foot. Mr. Speaker, that was approximately \$10 per square foot over the average rental costs being incurred at that time. No tender call, a net cost to the taxpayer that we have calculated at \$21 million, an additional \$21 million more than what they needed, and we had lots of office space in the provincial government already.

Just in those three examples that I've given you there, a million dollars that we could have saved on computer equipment, probably

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

\$3 million to \$5 million on the NovAtel loan collections. Now we're up to – let's take the average – let's say \$4 million there. Another \$21 million just on Olympia & York, had they gone to a public tender process. Mr. Speaker, if we'd had Bill 221 in force at that time, the savings to the government on these three bids alone would have been about \$25 million. That's a big chunk of change that we need to protect. Our responsibility as legislators is to ensure that we collectively handle the taxpayers' money in a responsible, open, accountable method. That's what Bill 221 proposes, and I'm sure all members of the House want to see that happen and therefore will support Bill 221.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising to participate in Bill 221 today. I paid careful attention in listening to the Member for Calgary-North West. I was really kind of encouraged for the first five or six or seven minutes of his overview with respect to the Bill. It's called Bill 221, Government Open Contract Act, and references to the minister mean the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, which really caught my attention. Quite frankly, this little Bill – a page and a half or something, five sections on it – has some aspects of merit to me. I was going to address it and I was going to talk about it, but then the hon. member gave the rationale for it.

I guess it is a responsibility for someone like me to just explain a few things. First of all, to the hon. member: if this Bill refers to the minister meaning the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, I would like to inform him that his comments with respect to IBM and CGI have absolutely nothing to do with the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. Secondly, his comments with respect to North West Trust and NovAtel have absolutely nothing to do with the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services or the Alberta Department of Public Works, Supply and Services or any procurement thereof. I'd be very, very pleased to explain to the hon. member again, which I have done in the House on numerous occasions, the specifics with respect to the O & Y arrangement. I have provided specific information and commented periodically in recent years with respect to it.

4:50

O & Y was done at a time, a very, very important time in 1986, to promote construction jobs and to stimulate the development of downtown Edmonton as well as to serve the needs of the government as we went through the 1990s into the 21st century. It was applauded – applauded – by the current leader of the Liberal Party, who was then the mayor of the city of Edmonton, who was quoted profusely in all the major papers and all the major media at the time as saying: what a wonderful arrangement. It was done to promote and stimulate the development and the redevelopment of the downtown area in Edmonton. It was done, Mr. Speaker, to work co-operatively with the federal government and the municipal government of Edmonton. It was meant to revitalize what was going on, to give Edmonton a breath of fresh air.

It's always amazing to me, Mr. Speaker, and I guess perhaps I will go to the last breath that I have in my body, in about 84 years from now, still wondering what it is that a Liberal really, truly stands for. One day they say one thing; the remainder of the day they say exactly the opposite thing in another part of the province of Alberta. And if there ever was a prime example of guns blaring in two different directions and shooting one another, it's O & Y.

Mr. Speaker, the record in the *Hansard* of this Alberta Legislative Assembly contains comments with respect to O & Y. The first

two that the hon. member talked about in order to rationalize his argument have absolutely nothing to do with the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services or the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. I say that because the Bill itself has some merit. Unfortunately, the rationale provided by the member has absolutely nothing to do with the Bill. Maybe that is another trait of Liberals, too, that in essence they address certain things and then come forward on other things.

So let's talk about Bill 221, Mr. Speaker, but let's talk about it on the basis of where we're at in the province of Alberta in how we deal with this, because I think it's also very important that we deal with matters affecting what this Bill is supposed to be for. I gather that's the relevancy argument that always comes in in this Legislative Assembly, that the Speaker would direct all hon. members to focus their comments on the Bill, and I think we should. That's why I really question what the Member for Calgary-North West was doing when he was giving these stories about other things which have absolutely nothing to do with the Bill and used it as rationale for the Bill. So I don't know about this planning, and I don't know about this organization.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should bring the hon. member and other people up to date in terms of what it is and how we deal with procurement in the province of Alberta. This is an area that some of us have been involved in for a great period of time and in fact have always believed that there's a high level of integrity associated with the public tendering process that we do have in the province of Alberta. The hon. member did not bring forth any example whatsoever of any questionable activity that's been conducted by the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services in the province of Alberta. If in fact the hon. member had brought forward an example or two, at least that would have given me an opportunity to perhaps deal with it and perhaps find out about something that I was unaware of in the past.

I do not recall, in the years that I have been privileged to be the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, if there's ever been one question on the Order Paper, if there's ever been one question in question period about anything other than an honourable way in which business is conducted. Mr. Speaker, that's very, very important, and I want to put that on the record because there are several thousand men and women associated with this particular department who conduct themselves with a great deal of honour and a great deal of integrity. If there's any suggestion whatsoever by the Member for Calgary-North West and the Liberal Party that in fact those several thousand people who are employed in various corners of the province of Alberta are less than honourable men and women and have conducted themselves in anything less than the most honourable of honourable ways, then I think that would be a slur to them. You can be assured that all my employees in this department, whether they live in Calgary, Calgary-North West, Barrhead, or Edmonton, are going to get a copy of my speech because they're going to know that their minister feels very, very strongly about the integrity they show. It's requested of them and required of them by their minister, who will not tolerate anything other than the most appropriate and the most honourable manner in which to conduct the public business in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in terms of a tendering process.

Mr. Speaker, under sections 11(1)(a) and 11(2) of the public works, supply and services Act, the minister in question is empowered to acquire supplies. We should define what that particular definition of supplies is all about, because there are certain supplies that are acquired by a government that are not acquired by the minister in particular. Professional services in a variety of the departments and agencies of this government are

acquired directly by those departments and those agencies. If a particular individual, an architect or an engineer, is needed by the Department of Municipal Affairs, they do not have to have that service acquired by the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. I should point out as well that Treasury Board Directive 04/84, which goes back some nine years, assigns responsibility in the areas of the acquisition of computer services as well as hardware and software.

Goods, computer services, and contracts for the construction of facilities are normally acquired by the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services through the competitive tendering process. On an annual basis we maintain an open source list with 14,000 – that's one-four-zero-zero-zero – vendors currently registered for service. Vendors are normally invited to bid on all opportunities in their identified product lines. As well, the interprovincial and intergovernmental agreement on government procurement requires that this department advertise at least every six months the steps to be taken to get on government source lists, and thereby we keep this procurement process open and unbiased. Agreed to; we've agreed – in fact, we led Canada in ensuring that this would happen – to have other signatories across this country come together and update these lists.

Mr. Speaker, over 10,000 contracts are issued annually in the province with a value of some \$275 million. All are through the public access, open bidding process. All tenders are opened in public, and vendors are able to witness and examine publicly opened tenders at their choice and convenience. Tender results are available to all vendors and are provided on a regular basis on request.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 221 that the hon. member has put forward seeks to have all qualifying bids received for a tender published. Well, the process is already in place. It accomplishes the same purpose. We simply don't publish the results of all these bids – how many thousands did I say there were per year? – because the cost is prohibitive, but if anybody wants them, they're easily accessible. In fact, because the bids are opened in public, usually all the people who have submitted a bid and think they're in a competitive way show up. It's all done in front of them.

Mr. Speaker, we can't increase the cost of government with unnecessary production and duplication of paper. We have to be environmentally conscious today. If it's considered to be the Liberal approach to cut down more trees, to create more bureaucracy, then so be it, but we have to be responsible. Taxpayers are out there telling us to cut down on government red tape, cut down on government bureaucracy. Basically, let's get on with the business of doing what we're supposed to be doing, which is providing services to the citizen at the least amount of dollars available to them.

Mr. Speaker, to do what the Liberals ask us to do today would simply . . . I suppose if there are 10,000 bids – I think that's what I said – and if 20 firms bid at each one of them, what the Liberals are asking us to do is to send out 10,000 times 20 pieces of paper telling people that these were the results of this thing. Well, can you calculate how many trees are involved in that, how much postage is required, how much additional manpower we have to go out and hire? And for what purpose? For what purpose? It would all be transparent. It would be more wasted paper in the garbage bins of the province. I'm sorry; I can't do that. I can't do that at all.

Mr. Speaker, I want all people to know as well that goods purchased are to the fullest extent possible competitively solicited. Oftentimes we'll source at least three suppliers. In fact, we'll almost require that there have to be competitive bids when we put something out. In other words, if we advertise something and only

one person puts a bid on it, my officials basically will say no, it has to be redone.

5:00

Now, needless to say, in a system as large as this, in an environment as old as this, there are some exceptions to the competitive open system. I don't think hon. gentlemen and ladies of the House would expect that if we had to purchase three pencils for the forestry shop in Fort Assiniboine, we would require the ranger to take half a day to get three bids to purchase the three pencils. We wouldn't do that. So you've got to have some commonplace exceptions. It may very well be that the Liberal Party would expect that, Mr. Speaker, but it's certainly not the way we do business in the 1990s. No, we will not accept any legislation that comes in here and says that a highly trained forest officer, who should be out there protecting the forests, going after poachers and people who would desecrate the wildlife of this province – we will not cause them to spend half a day of their time going out and getting competitive bids to buy three pencils.

You know, sometimes when you look at some of this legislation that comes forward, you see this kind of imagined bogeyman approach being taken. Well, we trust our employees in this government, Mr. Speaker. We trust the men and women to go down and buy the soap they'll need to clean if they have to clean. Or if an enforcement officer has a tire blowup in the vehicle they have, we have provisions for them to go and purchase that tire at a local business, not having to come back to one central source, as the Liberals would have it, and just have one great big warehouse. No, no, no. We encourage our employees to participate in small businesses throughout the province of Alberta. We give them certain limits in which they can purchase certain things.

Now, one can do that sort of thing if products are required to match existing installations, for emergency purchases, and for engineering and architectural services. I guess the Liberal Party, if we had to hire an architect or an engineer to build something, would have us say, "Okay; identify what it is that you want to have done and then go and put this bid out." Then you'd have all these architects and engineers who are professional people bidding with one another to provide the service. It's an interesting idea, but I think it's a kind of horrifying idea, quite frankly. I've tested that with these two professions in the province of Alberta, both the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta, or APEGGA, and the Alberta Association of Architects. I also have the privilege of being the minister responsible for both those professional groups, Mr. Speaker. They told me they were horrified that in fact they'd heard some people were thinking of doing that. They wanted to let me know in no uncertain terms that it just wouldn't work and it couldn't work. We've got to be realistic. We simply can't do things like that. So there are some exceptions.

Bill 221 proposes a mandatory open tender process for all contracts over \$50,000 in value. It also anticipates that the private sector would be divided on the merits of introducing such a mandatory process. Well, Mr. Speaker, we are in consultation with private-sector firms all the time, including the Alberta Chamber of Commerce, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, other chambers of commerce throughout the province of Alberta, and other businesses. They recognize that there are situations where it would not be practical to provide certain goods and services to the government through open competition. Now, we've got to talk about those things, because I think the hon. member didn't recognize them. How would we deal with material with copyright or patent restrictions? How would we deal with equipment that

would be required to match existing installations? How would we deal with emergency procurement in disaster relief conditions?

Think of it, Mr. Speaker. A tornado hits Edmonton at 5 o'clock on a Friday afternoon. The minister responsible has got to respond. He's got to assign emergency helicopters. He's got to assign emergency fire equipment, emergency equipment for the hundreds and hundreds of people who've lost their homes. He has to make instant decisions to get beds, clothing, medicine to those people. Well, under the Liberal thing, you advertise it. Three weeks later the thing closes, and three weeks later again you award it. In the meantime, seven weeks have gone by and they're hammering. They would be hammering the minister, saying, "Why aren't you doing anything?" So what would he meekly say? "But you caused us to pass your Bill, and by causing us to pass your Bill, you've now made us ineffective." They've got to do better than that, and they've got to do more thinking than that.

You know, the member is really not a bad guy. I thought he was kind of tricky this afternoon in question period, Mr. Speaker. But he's got to do more thinking if he wants to talk about becoming a lawmaker, because in order to be a lawmaker, you've got to consider all the things we have in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, those are just a couple of examples I've identified so far. I think perhaps I'll identify a few more. Bill 221 seems to be designed to change the manner in which the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services acquires goods and services under the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services Act. But this Bill applies to only one department. Why wouldn't this Bill apply to all agencies and all bodies associated with the government of Alberta? Once again, laws and Bills must apply to all. I gather what the member is saying is that various boards and agencies don't have to go through one central source. Obviously what you'd have then is one set of rules for one department, another set of rules for another department, a third set of rules for another department, and a different set of rules for this Crown corporation. Well, you'd drive the citizen and the businessperson of this province absolutely nuts. They wouldn't know what's going on.

What we have to do in government is reduce the amount of bureaucracy, reduce the amount of red tape, reduce the amount of confusion, in fact have plain English emanating from all the purchasing agencies of the government. But no, not the Liberals. If there's a way to screw it up, they'll find it. I'm telling you, Mr. Speaker, when you look at 221, it's a good step in that direction. I think the private sector would be absolutely horrified. In fact, I might send this out to all 10,000 of those groups or the 14,000 who are on source lists and tell them that, okay, this is what might happen. I don't want to be a bogeyman; I just want to make sure the people understand what's going on.

It's certainly not clear at all in Bill 221 if the Bill intentionally excludes a number of different acquisitions. It's not clear at all. We've talked about engineering services; we've talked about architectural services. What about management consulting services? Is it only restricted to supplies? There are all kinds of things. Again, I don't want to have anything we do in government become increasingly negative. Unfortunately, it seems to me that is exactly what would happen under Bill 221.

Now, I said at the outset, Mr. Speaker, that I listened very attentively for the first several minutes to what the hon. member said. I was kind of encouraged. I really was. I thought he was taking a serious interest in what was going on in this Assembly. I thought that obviously with that \$600,000 a year the Liberal caucus gets to do research, in fact they had really taken some of those dollars and wisely expended them in ensuring there was an understanding, first of all, of the Department of Public Works,

Supply and Services Act; secondly, that they completely understood what was going on in the province of Alberta in procurement. I presumed the hon. gentleman was going to come up and talk about some horrifying example somebody had given him in an attempt to embarrass the government. He certainly hasn't done that, so I thank him for at least not doing that. The examples he brought up have nothing to do with the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. So I don't understand what the connection was. I would have thought as well that the hon. member would have said, "You know, this Bill will have the government do more of what the government already is doing that's good." I thought the member was going to stand up and say, "Hey, what you did there in the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services just a few days ago when you made an announcement with respect to the automated electronic open bidding system, what you did there in becoming the first province in Canada to join this new automated electronic open bidding system, is what we need to know more of." But no, the hon. member didn't even mention that.

5:10

Just a few days ago we led Canada again in coming forth with this. In fact, we made the announcement on April 15, 1993, that this new, new private-sector organization called Information Systems Management Corporation, a private-sector company in Canada, is going to supply information on procurement opportunities. They've got a computer system, and an entrepreneur - no matter where you live, you phone up. If you offer widgets, you ask a computer to match you with which level of government is sourcing widgets that day. They'll put you right on line with it. You can break it down in a matter of a minute and a half and get all the possible information you want about open bidding in the province of Alberta. Innovative, dramatic, inexpensive, Mr. Speaker. You can phone that computer and find out in fact who the other competitors are you would have in the marketplace: an innovative thing. If you're an entrepreneur and the contract calls for 4,000 widgets but your production line allows you to produce only 2,000 widgets, you would know you couldn't bid on that contract, so you wouldn't waste any time doing it. You'd have accessed information instantly, electronically, and it's there. But no, what do we get here? We get a Liberal suggestion that in essence what you should do is print 20 pages for 10,000 particular sources: trees, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness compared to what we announced on April 15, 1993.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want that hon. member to look deeply at himself tonight when he goes home and stands in front of the mirror. I want him to look deeply into his eyes because I don't understand why he wouldn't have stood up today and congratulated the government for being a leader in the country of Canada with respect to this innovative technology. Why won't he admit that in fact his Bill pales in significance to what is already in existence? Why didn't he have the kind of good integrity to withdraw his Bill and not have the minister of public works exercised on a Thursday afternoon and have to come here and tell it like it is?

We have done so many other things, Mr. Speaker. I get kind of excited talking about this. We're talking about procurement. We're talking about the private sector. We're talking about economic opportunities. We're talking about jobs. We're talking about innovation. We're talking about the new marketplace.

We have *The Source* magazine, a wonderful document that we now put out on a regular basis. We identify six months ahead of time what it is we will be sourcing in the marketplace. As an example, in the edition we would put out in May of this year, we would notify all entrepreneurs in the province of Alberta that six

months from now some agency of the government will be looking for a certain thing. You know what, Mr. Speaker? I've had only one complaint from anybody with respect to this brilliant magazine called *The Source*. I've had all kinds of letters from the private sector saying "wonderful."

But do you know who ridicules it, Mr. Speaker? The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud put out a silly press release about two years ago saying how scandalous it was that the government was telling the business community in this province what it might be going after six months from now. You know, I may live for another 85 years; I will live in bewilderment and dazzlement as to why these people continue to do that. Surely, surely, surely it comes down to, number one, knowledge of what is in place, it comes down to integrity, and it comes down to being up to date with what's going on.

It seems to me the public has not been well served this afternoon, my hon. friend. They have not been well served. The honourable thing the hon. member should have done is withdrawn Bill 221. Mr. Speaker, there still is time. But surely, surely we're not going to be in a position to support Bill 221. I know other hon. members will want to contribute to this wonderful debate, but I just thought that in a very modest way I would try to bring members up to date as to where we're at.

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to add a few comments on Bill 221, the Government Open Contract Act, as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. To the extent that it is well motivated and intentioned, it's a welcome contribution, because there's no question all Albertans want to have the maximum degree of confidence in the public tendering process. That has not always been the case. The Member for Calgary-North West mentioned the O & Y situation. We tried to get details on the contracting tenders and provisions and arrangements regarding that deal, and there seemed to be difficulty in the government coming forward.

Sometimes there is a perception, Mr. Speaker, that people get together with ministers over cocktails and then all of a sudden things happen in government. So I think this is a step in the right direction in the sense that it would make sure that all tenders made for contracts over \$50,000 a year would have to be made public. Where tenders were put forward and the government chose a tender that was not the lowest, there would be an obligation on the part . . .

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. WEISS: A point of order, Mr. Speaker, if I may.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Fort McMurray rises on a point of order?

MR. WEISS: Yes, I might as well, seeing the carefree attitude that's been expressed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. The point of order is 23(h) and (i), if I may, Mr. Speaker. Imputing motives is one, and he referred to the fact that hon. members are joining over cocktails and other such variety of references. I would point out that many of us totally abstain from alcohol and do not join in cocktails at any hour. So I'd ask the hon. member to withdraw the remark, please.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, I didn't suggest myself that that was happening. I only suggested that people have expressed that perception to me on occasion. Another perception that is perhaps closer to the truth is that sometimes deals are struck on golf courses, where some members of the government are known to spend a lot of time. So it was not my insinuation or allegation but only expressing that some people expressed that perception to me.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. I think we'll just leave it there, hon. Member for Fort McMurray. I believe that's been cleared up. Thank you.

Carry on.

Debate Continued

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, certainly we want to have the highest degree of public confidence in the tendering process, and to the extent this would help, we might want to look at initiatives along this line.

I would like to make a couple of points. One is in terms of section 3, where we have the limit of \$50,000. I wonder sometimes how wise it is to put a dollar figure on a piece of legislation. If it were passed, five years from now or 10 years from now \$50,000 might not be what it is today. We'd have to be bringing legislation back to the Legislature all the time to make sure it's contemporary and current. Perhaps it might be better reserved for regulations, which are somewhat easier to keep current and up to date.

A couple of other points too. I'm disappointed that the Member for Calgary-North West didn't put in Bill 221 a fair wage clause for bidding on government contracts. A fair wage clause, Mr. Speaker, is one that would ensure that all contractors, those who want to bid on government contracts, will provide those goods and services that employ Albertans at reasonable wages. I think the government has a responsibility to make sure contracting is done on a fair and level playing field. We shouldn't have a situation where contractors bidding on government contracts for goods and services should be trying to obtain those kinds of contracts by paying the lowest possible wages. Sometimes there seems to be a lot of downward pressure on wages, especially in difficult economic times like we're in now, and I think the government has some obligation to ensure that when they do contract for goods and services, those are provided insofar as those contractors have to engage Albertans to produce those services and to provide them on a fair wage basis.

Another clause that I would like to have seen is not in this Bill. It doesn't particularly provide as clearly as I would like to have seen for the provision of public-sector agencies in bidding on government contracts. There is often the view among Conservative ranks – and I don't know how much this is shared by our colleagues in the Liberal Party – that the private sector is always more efficient than the public sector. I would just put out an example here. Saskatchewan Government Insurance tried to bid on business in Manitoba and was declined the opportunity to do so. Taxpayers' interests were compromised, I would suggest, in that case, and that could easily be the case in Alberta, that we could have public-sector agencies that should be encouraged to compete and allowed to compete for government services. In other words, let's make sure we have the best interests of taxpayers at heart, and let's avoid doctrinaire views, such as we often see on the other side, that the only good that can be done is in the private sector.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, given the hour, I would like to move that the question now be called on Bill 221. [Motion lost]

MR. SPEAKER: Smoky River.

5:20

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity and thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak on Bill 221 as well. I can't support the Bill. I think what the Bill attempts to do is alter the competitive process that is in place at this time. Obviously, as my colleague the hon. minister has pointed out, the process is working and working very effectively and certainly is one that doesn't need to be tampered with. I think the hon. minister has pointed out the abusive laws the proposed Bill would bring forward. I think there would be some dangers coming forward with the process the hon. Member for Calgary-North West would be developing.

Competitive tendering for public services has always been a highly contentious subject and no doubt will be. Mr. Speaker, anytime a situation develops where you have winners and losers, where you have people who are successful and those who are not successful, you're going to have some degree of contention. That obviously is a process you have when you have the competitive bidding process. Contracting out is a vast area covering possible use of private contractors or a whole range of public-sector services. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the absence of competition from private contractors, there are no alternative sources for information, no alternative cost yardsticks to assess the efficiency of a public agency. Efficiency is always concerned with the lowest cost method of supplying a given quantity and quality of service. That's the process we have to incorporate, and that's the process we have to see stays in place in an adequate manner. Certainly the thrust of Bill 221 would take away from that process. It indeed would eschew the process. That's not something I could support, and I hope it's not something this House ever supports.

Given the vast scope of Bill 221, there seems to be exceptionally narrow focus. I concur with my colleague that Bill 221 appears to address only those acquisitions through Public Works, Supply and Services. What about all the other procuring areas? How would we handle that? You no doubt would require a Bill 222 to deal with those types of issues, and so we have a whole conglomerate of Bills coming forward.

This of course adds to the typical efficiency our Liberal colleagues keep bringing forward. What it would do is create additional costs. It would create additional expenditures that aren't necessary. It would complicate a process that is working very effectively and very efficiently today and a process that really doesn't need to be tampered with. I concur with the questioning of the Bill where it intentionally excludes services that are acquired by all other departments, boards, and agencies without going through Public Works, Supply and Services. It seems to me that the intent of Bill 221 is to alter the way Public Works, Supply and Services acquires goods and services under the department of public works. A simple amendment to the existing legislation

would suffice if indeed our hon. colleague from Calgary-North West had a true intent of trying to streamline the process.

The Bill seeks to require that all government contracts valued at more than \$50,000 must be filed through the tendering process, and all qualifying bids received from a tender must be published. Obviously my hon. colleague has already addressed the complexity of that issue, an issue that indeed would create havoc as far as costing is concerned, as far as additional expenditures are concerned, with no true benefit. If anyone is interested today, you always have that option; all tendering is very public. You can access the information by simply being present, which you can be, or by requesting the information, and that can come forward. Why should we take the time to contact each and every individual? The onus has to be on those who are involved and those who are interested, and that has to be the process that remains in place. Obviously Bill 221 would create a situation of vast expenditure in a time when we're trying to cut back expenditure.

The 1991 intergovernmental agreement on government procurement requires that all provinces, including Alberta, publicly conduct and publish all tenders in excess of \$25,000 for the purchase of goods. How would this fit in with the intergovernmental agreement where the member is going to change it to \$50,000, where we already have a process that's in place for \$25,000? Has that been thought out? The 1989 western trade barrier reduction agreement has similar criteria for the purchase of goods and services but has no minimum dollar threshold. This would conflict with the agreement in place between the western provinces. How would we deal with that issue, and has thought been given to this process? I have to say no. I don't think the Bill has been well thought out. I don't think the Bill has any value whatsoever.

In light of the time, Mr. Speaker, I ask that we adjourn debate.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise all members that we will reconvene at 8 o'clock, and when we do so, we will be reconvening to hear the Provincial Treasurer indicate that he's received a certain message. After the Provincial Treasurer has concluded with his Budget Address and should the Leader of the Opposition choose to adjourn the debate, it would be the intention of the government to call additional government business and we'll be dealing with second reading of Bill 66. If the Leader of the Opposition chooses to conduct a debate tonight, then we would not proceed with Bill 66. The intention is to work until about 10 o'clock.

Business tomorrow would begin with the Leader of the Opposition dealing with the budget if he chooses to, Mr. Speaker. If not, we will be proceeding with Bill 66.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:29 pm.]

