

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, February 17, 1994 1:30 p.m.**

Date: 94/02/17

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance.

Amen.

head: Presenting Petitions

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce the first installment of a petition on the Misericordia hospital signed by citizens of the west end of Edmonton.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce the second installment of a petition from the citizens of the west end of Edmonton as well as surrounding areas with regards to the Misericordia hospital.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce into the Assembly the third installment, and many more thousands, tens of thousands to follow, of Edmontonians who are very concerned about the future of the Misericordia hospital.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce to you and through you a petition signed by 2,000 residents of Edmonton-Avonmore and also the larger Mill Woods area, Ellerslie, Beaumont, and surrounding sectors served by the Grey Nuns hospital petitioning this government to please not shut down the Grey Nuns hospital in our area.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition in this House today signed by 4,136 people from the southeast Edmonton area, which includes the constituencies of Edmonton-Avonmore, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and Edmonton-Mill Woods, and the surrounding rural area.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition signed by 3,000 residents of southeast Edmonton asking that the Grey Nuns hospital remain an active treatment hospital.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the government's approach of rule by rumour, I too beg leave to introduce a petition signed by 1,307 residents of the east end of Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and county of Strathcona petitioning the government not to shut down the Grey Nuns hospital or change it from an active service facility.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly three visitors to our fine gallery: two from Calgary, Michael O'Neil and Larry McDonald, and a third gentleman, from Fort Worth, Texas, Hans Kossler. These three gentlemen are involved with the firm North American Consulting LLC. It's a firm consisting of efficiency experts in the engineering consulting field. The three partners of this firm are in the public gallery. If they would stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of this House.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would beg leave to introduce constituents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan to the Assembly. I'd ask them to stand at this time and be recognized: Grace Young, Brenda Higham, Dixie Stumpf, and David Doyle. They will be meeting with the Minister of Health later today, and we thank you publicly for that, Minister of Health. Please extend a warm welcome.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two individuals, constituents of Sherwood Park who will be joining in the meeting with the Minister of Health this afternoon. The constituents are Jim Roy and Irene Fisher. They, too, are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce through you to the Assembly a constituent of Lac La Biche-St. Paul who is in the public gallery today. Her name is Mrs. Juliette Langevin. I would ask that you stand. Juliette is the wife of Paul Langevin, my colleague.

MR. LANGEVIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly some people who are very close to me: my sister-in-law from St. Paul, Rachelle Langevin, and her four young Liberals, who are here today to learn the ropes, Carmen, Denis, Marc, and Roger, and also my sister from St. Albert Therese Tremblay and her two children, Danica and Shawn. Would you rise.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mayfield.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 13 students and their instructor from Alberta Vocational College. They're in the diploma challenge program. I'd like to ask them to rise, these adult students in our city, and be warmly welcomed.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour for me to introduce today a former member of this Assembly, minister of the Crown, who served the former constituency of Edmonton-Parkallen and who will be in the history books as being the first ever elected Deputy Chairman of Committees. I'd ask Mr. Doug Main to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a constituent of mine who is visiting the Legislature today, Mr. Doug Johnson, who farms in the Endiang area. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

1995 Canada Winter Games

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pride in informing the Assembly that beginning one year from Saturday the Peace River region of this great province will have two weeks of provincial and national attention when Grande Prairie hosts the 1995 Canada Winter Games from February 19 to March 4, 1995. The Canada games are this country's largest national amateur sporting competition being held here in our own province. This is only the second time in the last 20 years that Alberta has had the honour of hosting this event, which is often referred to as a national treasure and rightly so. Lethbridge was the host city back in 1975.

As you can imagine, this is a unique opportunity for all Albertans to support a sporting event of this magnitude. Not only will Grande Prairie and the Peace River region benefit from the tremendous exposure that these games will provide, but the entire province will have the opportunity to shine by providing support of local tourism, culture, sports, and business.

I'm certain, Mr. Speaker, that all members of this Assembly will join me in congratulating the city of Grande Prairie as they enter their final year of preparations leading to the best ever Canada Winter Games from February 19 to March 4, 1995. I respectfully ask that all of my colleagues take this message back to their constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege for me to stand and to acknowledge this great honour that comes to Alberta and comes to the city of Grande Prairie and the great opportunity for the province and for the city of Grande Prairie. Most Canadians don't realize how different our province is in terms of the various landscapes of our regions. If Albertans and other Canadians had the opportunity to travel into the Peace River country, the Grande Prairie area, they would see a magnificence of our province that is breathtaking. This opportunity allows Canadians and even our own Albertans to see that breathtaking part of Alberta.

Three thousand athletes, not including coaches, will be in Grande Prairie and the Jasper venue for these exciting days. I think the great strength of Alberta and certainly the strength of Grande Prairie are the volunteers that have built up, have established, have created this opportunity and the volunteers who will make this such a tremendous success.

We offer on behalf of the Liberal caucus, the opposition, the congratulations of our caucus to Grande Prairie and region for getting the games and hosting them, we know, in a tremendous way.

Thank you, sir.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Hospital Services

MR. DECORE: Thank you, sir. Thousands of people in Edmonton and in Calgary – and you could see that, Mr. Speaker, in the introduction of the petitions today – are worried about health care in Edmonton and in Calgary, but the Premier says: don't worry; we have a plan; studies are being done. But a leaked document – and I'd like to file this document now – a Calgary district hospital board's document says that the much flaunted study into Calgary hospital closures is based on a "superficial financial analysis." My first question to the Premier is this: is the Premier actually going to close down hospitals in Calgary based on a superficial financial analysis? Is that how this is going to be done?

MR. KLEIN: I'd be glad to see the document and the author of the document and whose assessment it is. As I understand it, the firm of Price Waterhouse was commissioned in the city of Calgary to conduct a detailed examination of all the hospitals to determine areas of duplication and overlap and where services could be better delivered. As I understand it, that report outlined about five options, I believe. Those options have now been presented to the CEOs and the chairmen of the various hospital boards in the city of Calgary. Those options are now being reviewed, and I believe in due course their recommendations – that is, the local groups' recommendations – will be presented to the minister.

MR. DECORE: In fact, the leaked document is an analysis by the hospitals in Calgary, and it does relate, Mr. Premier, to the Price Waterhouse study. The analysis says that Price Waterhouse didn't have enough financial resources to do a proper analysis. How, if you don't have the proper resources to do an analysis, can you make decisions on the closure of hospitals in Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is offering an opinion based on a leaked document. I would like an opportunity to have an assessment of that particular document. I would also . . . [interjection] Would Chip just keep his mouth shut? I would also like to have an opportunity for our officials to question Price Waterhouse officials to determine if indeed they had the resources to carry out a proper study.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, more and more we see, Albertans see that the Premier really has no plan. This is starting to sound like a book: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Klein.

What does the Premier say to people? This kind of planning in health care with the lives of people just isn't good enough, Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the kind of planning that is going on in the city of Calgary is the epitome of community planning. This planning involves the administrators of the hospitals, the chairmen of the hospitals, various community groups and special interest groups, along with professionals, financial analysts, doctors, nurses, patients getting involved in the process to see what can be done in Calgary – I think the same applies to Edmonton – in terms of breaking down the overlapping and duplication that now exists and how the system can be streamlined for the benefit of the patient.

MR. DECORE: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me get to the issue of the so-called epitome of planning. Let me file, first, copies of a leaked letter dated January 25, 1994, from the Minister of Health. The Minister of Health admits in this leaked letter that her regional

health care boards won't even exist before major hospitals in Edmonton and Calgary are closed: won't even exist. The minister has appointed a panic committee to make these decisions ahead of time. My first question, then, is this: what sense does it make, Madam Minister, to force \$100 million in cuts to Edmonton and Calgary before the regional hospital boards are even in place?

MRS. McCLELLAN: First of all, let me make one thing very clear: that is not a leaked letter. Anybody who received that letter from the Minister of Health had the opportunity to share it with anyone, and obviously somebody saw fit to do it, and that's fine. So it is not a leak; it's a document as any other document that is submitted.

We have put some funding targets out, and we did them in early form to ensure that the institutions had an opportunity to plan. The acute care facilities in both of our major cities have undertaken over the past several months, and indeed in the case of Edmonton longer than that, to plan how they are going to deliver health services: one, to their communities, which is very important; two, secondary care, where they have responsibilities; as well as tertiary care in cases, whether it's northern Alberta, southern Alberta. In both cities some of our hospitals offer very highly specialized tertiary care to the province. They have undergone a very active method of planning and work. That has involved a number of documents, and some documents a month ago could be outdated a week later. That's what planning is, and the responsibility for that planning lies clearly with the people who have that responsibility, who are in the best position, Mr. Speaker, to understand the needs of the communities they serve. Each board in both our major centres has a responsibility to the communities and to the province. They clearly understand that responsibility. They have worked very hard in doing a planning process.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the minister, just like the Premier, talks like that's the way planning is. Well, it's the minister last session who said that there was a plan for health care, and her own chief facilitator two days later or three days later said: "Plan? There's no plan."

Since half of the patients in big city hospitals – that is, in Calgary and Edmonton – come from rural Alberta, how, Madam Minister, are rural Albertans going to have input into ensuring that closures in the big cities don't affect them?

1:50

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I outlined in my first answer that the hospitals in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary clearly understand their mandate, and their mandate is to provide care to the communities that they serve, Edmonton and Calgary, and secondary, and most emphatically, tertiary care to the province. They have all of the information on referral patterns. They know the programs they deliver. They have a great deal of historic data as to how many procedures they deal with, and they are funded today on that basis. They will be continuing to do that.

One thing that is very important, though, in these discussions is: are we indeed using the other facilities, the regional hospitals we have and other facilities, to the best of their advantage? That is being considered in this whole degree of planning. For the hon. member to say that I said there was a plan – I said that planning has occurred in this province over a period of years. Mr. Speaker, I could go through the litany of planning beginning with The Rainbow Report, but I know you wish brevity.

MR. DECORE: In fact, that is the case, that hospitals in the big cities do understand their mandate, Madam Minister. Why, then,

when you acknowledge that, do you have to set up a panic committee to do their job? That's what you're doing.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there is no panic committee set up. However, as the minister has indicated to both city planning groups over the period of the last several months, if they require any assistance, if they wish to vet some of their discussions with our health plan steering co-ordination project, that is available to them. We have given them some names from that committee that are prepared to work with them upon their request. That is clear.

Health Services Restructuring

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, if you ever wanted to know how not to do health care reform, then you only have to look at how this government is failing to co-ordinate home care funding with pending hospital cuts and closures. On April 1 hospitals in Edmonton and Calgary are going to be cut and closed, and on the very same day, not six months before, not three months before, not even one week before, on the very same day they may be shifting some kind of money to home care facilities. To the Premier: how can the Premier ever expect this process to work when he hasn't allowed for some kind of transition time to get from one place to the other?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the whole process has been a question of transition, of moving from one stage into the other. Basically, what is happening in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton – and I do have to make a comment on this. The kind of fear mongering that is being stirred up now by the Liberals in the community in the absence of a report and proper consideration of that report is absolutely disgraceful. When you speak of petitions, I would like to remind them of another petition that was taken, and that was taken on June 15, and we all know what the result of that petition was.

Mr. Speaker, the program is coming together as the minister anticipated. There has been a long-term planning process under way in both Calgary and Edmonton, again involving health caregivers, involving patients, involving community groups, involving administrators of hospitals, involving the CEOs or the chairmen of those hospital boards and the members of those boards to try and achieve for the minister's consideration reasonable rationalization of health care services in those jurisdictions.

MR. MITCHELL: There are still only six weeks to go before hospital cuts and closures. Why hasn't the Minister of Health even contacted boards like the Edmonton board of health to find out what they think should be done with new home care funding, shifted home care funding, and shifted community care funding?

MRS. McCLELLAN: First of all, that is not my deadline for discussions of openings or closings of hospitals; that is the hon. member's. He's pulled that figure out of the air. That has not been discussed by this minister, and the member knows that full well. However, what we did do was announce early on that we would be removing \$100 million from the acute care areas in Calgary and Edmonton. That gives opportunity for planning. In that, we also said that there would be dedicated dollars to shift to the community. That is something that has been occurring over a period of years as we have shifted more from institutional to the community.

There is also a fact that the hon. members must recognize: Alberta has carried a very high bed ratio compared to the rest of

the country. Every province in Canada including some that are unfortunately governed by the same party as the people opposite has lowered their bed ratios in this country. Every province in Canada is undergoing restructuring. One of the differences in Alberta is that we are doing the restructuring on the basis of community decision-making, community input, not on an arbitrary directive from the Minister of Health.

MR. MITCHELL: I wonder whether the minister could stand in this House and give us some indication of when she is going to consult the communities of west end Edmonton and southeast Edmonton and central Calgary and northwest Calgary and southwest Calgary about what they want done with their hospitals on April 1.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, my type of consultation with these people would be considerably different than that of the member opposite. I will deal in facts not in speculation. That is very unfair to the communities themselves as well as the providers of health care in those institutions. I think it's disgraceful.

There is community involvement, and I would remind the hon. members that there is an Edmonton Region Health Facilities Planning Council, that has been in place for some time. It consists of membership from the Cancer Board, the Edmonton board of health — they are involved totally in these consultations — the Capital Care Group, which is long-term care, the Caritas group, the Glenrose group, the Royal Alex hospital, the Children's health centre, the Sturgeon general, and the University of Alberta. I would remind the hon. member that those people are represented by a board of directors which have a direct commitment to the community, and I hope he is not suggesting that those people on those boards are not representing their communities. Those are fine people with the best interests of Edmonton and the surrounding communities in mind.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Kindergarten Programs

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Education. Teachers are calling concerned about ECS being cut in half. Will the Department of Education have to change the curriculum from a more social curriculum to an academic curriculum?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the approach to early childhood education in the province is one where there has not been a curriculum in the traditional sense. The minister of the day released the early childhood services statement of goals and program dimensions and philosophy in 1984, and that provides the overall basis for early childhood services in this province. It emphasizes such things as teaching concepts of creativity, physical and intellectual development, emotional development factors. Therefore, within those goals and within that statement there's considerable flexibility, and I do not think the changes announced with respect to funding of early childhood services are such that they cannot be accommodated with the new funding. [interjections]

2:00

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] I'm listening to my constituency's concerns, and I would like to hear the answers. So if you wouldn't mind.

My second question is . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. ECS special-needs funding for children with mild and moderate disabilities is being maintained at current levels. I understand the funding will be maintained.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

MR. SPEAKER: No preambles to supplemental.

MRS. FORSYTH: My question. The hours for special needs: are they being cut?

MR. JONSON: The hon. member is quite correct in that the funding is being maintained, albeit it has been quite clear that those grants are subject to the same percentage reductions as the other grant areas. For instance, the program unit grants, Mr. Speaker, are being continued and the other grants for special-needs students that the hon. member mentioned. In addition, this year we are introducing an enhanced opportunity grant, which takes into its criteria the particular special needs of students in inner-city areas.

Now, I would indicate, however, Mr. Speaker, that with the reduction in the hours of ECS operation, if that is the alternative chosen, it is quite true that special-needs students would be going to ECS for a shorter period of time, but we feel that with the other programs offered with these special grants and with the fact that special-needs students are often in the early childhood services program for three or four years, there is adequate service to these students.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are concerned that half funding is only half effective. Will the reduction of ECS provide a sufficient foundation for a child's educational future?

MR. JONSON: In my view, adequate funding is being provided, Mr. Speaker. I realize that there are going to be challenges with respect to making new arrangements, but with funding which ranges up to perhaps \$15,000, \$16,000 per student and is ranged according to the needs of the students, I think there are supplementary programs that will be developed and their needs will be met.

Hospital Funding

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, on April 1 the Minister of Health is going to cut another \$110 million from acute care hospitals in this province. This is being done at the same time that the Alberta Hospital Association reports that hospitals are sitting on over \$100 million in surpluses. Why would the minister force bed closures and probably hospital closures instead of instructing hospitals to spend these accumulated dollars?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would expect the hon. member does remember that when I discussed reductions to hospitals, I did encourage them, certainly, to use their surpluses. But I should enlighten the hon. member by telling him that some of the surpluses that hospitals hold are generated by discretionary funding and offset funding. Discretionary funding comes from places like parking, from confectionaries, from gift shops. Hospitals have a fair amount of ability to disburse those funds in a proper manner because they are not government funds, they are

not public funds. However, there is a consideration that hospitals must utilize them first if they have a deficit. In many cases those surpluses are discretionary funds; they are not funds that I can direct. I did recommend that to the hospitals, and I am sure that our very responsible hospital boards are taking that very seriously.

MR. SAPERS: Hospitals in Alberta are publicly funded. Does the minister deny that these hospitals are publicly funded and that ultimately she is responsible as to how those dollars are spent?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member could deal with a question and an answer and then prepare a new question – I think I clearly explained that the funds that are publicly given to hospitals are used that way. Some surplus funds that hospitals hold may be discretionary funds. Those are not public dollars. They are not public dollars; they are dollars that are raised from activities that the hospital undertakes. I have made it clear to them that we would request that they use their surplus dollars to manage their very difficult times. I think we should applaud hospitals that have shown prudent management to accumulate surpluses. Certainly I would like to see them use them in this way.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I'll try the Premier. Mr. Premier, are you going to allow people to be put out of work and be denied medical services while hospitals sit on their bank accounts?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of fear mongering I was talking about. The answer is that we are going to continue to provide top-level health care in this province, and all the needs of those who are in need of health care services will be met. The fundamental target here again is the administration of the system. The minister has said time and time again: why do we need over 200 health boards and associated health units and long-term care boards; why can't we achieve a consolidation in the administration of health care services and achieve as much as we possibly can in savings from a streamlining of the administration so the money – now, listen to this – can go to the patient and good quality care?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Military Bases

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada forces base Currie is a significant member of the community I represent, and with the federal budget in preparation there are serious concerns about the reduction of the military presence in the province of Alberta and specifically in my riding. I'm wondering if the Premier could identify what consultation has taken place to ensure that we maintain a strong presence in Alberta.

MR. KLEIN: Well, all I can report, Mr. Speaker, is basically my conversation with Mr. Collette, the federal minister of defence. He simply gave us no indication as to what bases, if any, will be closed. The discussion was of a general nature. Basically he indicated to me that they would try to maintain the same per capita level of defence spending in Alberta as it would equate on a per capita basis to other provinces on a reduced basis, but he gave no indication as to what bases, if any, would be closed.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. BURGNER: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next concern, then, might be if there was a time line or a time frame outlined. Obviously there's an impact financially to the community, to the schools, and the local groups that are supported by the economic factor of the military base.

MR. KLEIN: There's no doubt about it that any closure of course would have an impact on the communities involved, not only Calgary and Edmonton but where other bases exist: Cold Lake and Suffield and Wainwright and of course Penhold. The minister did say that he hoped to have a decision on this matter by the 1st of April.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. BURGNER: Yes. My final comment from my constituents to ask the Premier is: will the Premier be able to advocate that there is support for the federal government in their reduction of the deficit vis-à-vis military reductions? They would like the Premier to know that that support is there in the community.

2:10

MR. KLEIN: We have indicated to the Prime Minister, we have indicated to various ministers that we understand completely the difficult situation the federal government is now dealing with relative to the national debt and the national deficit. Certainly they are going to have to make some fairly tough budget decisions. Perhaps they will be into the same kind of situation that all the provinces are now in; that is, addressing in our own ways our deficit and our debt situation. All we're saying to the federal government is: "Please do as we are doing; that is, before you look at the line services, look at the fundamental administration of government. Look at the administration of government. Look at the top, and look at how we can streamline the administration of government together before we get into the line services."

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Wage Rollbacks

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier asked Albertans to take a voluntary 5 percent wage cut and to co-operate with the Premier. Well, the clerical staff at the Fort McMurray regional hospital did so. A short time later some were fired. Their severance packages were based on their voluntarily reduced wage, and therefore they got a double whammy. My question today is to the Premier of this province. Did he intend that those people who would jump on board and co-operate with him would be double hit when they had to finally get their severance package?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, our appeal was to look at what could be done in the administration. The ultimate decision is the hospital's decision. We do not govern the hospital in Fort McMurray. Since I can't ask the hon. member a question, I wonder: does that hospital have a hospital board?

MR. GERMAIN: I would have thought that the Premier would know whether there was a hospital board in Fort McMurray, Mr. Speaker. He should have known that. Thank you, sir. Okay. There's a loophole in the plan.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm getting to the supplemental. So with the loophole in the plan, I ask the Premier today: what's his plan to prevent people who have to take this double hit from taking that hit?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, obviously he doesn't understand, because maybe he doesn't know if they have a board or not. The point I was trying to make is: has he taken his concern to the local hospital board? The local hospital board has either been appointed or elected to make these decisions. I ask the hon. member again: has he taken this to the local hospital board? [interjections]

MR. GERMAIN: I don't know why I rile the Premier so much, Mr. Speaker. I don't understand it.

My question, Mr. Speaker. There's a flaw here, so will the Premier move with lightning speed . . . [interjections]

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

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you.

There's an obvious flaw here, Mr. Speaker, so will the Premier move with lightning speed to close this loophole?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I don't know what loophole he is talking about, Mr. Speaker, nor am I sure if the hon. member is sure whether or not he knows there's a hospital board here or whether or not he knows he's talked to one. Relative to the assistance that is available with respect to job force adjustments, I will ask the hon. Minister of Labour to supplement.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, members opposite are so agitated, I'm surprised that today they were not wearing pampers instead of band-aids.

Negotiations are difficult at the best of times, and when the member opposite displays a total lack of understanding of process, that doesn't help negotiations at all. In fact, anytime that questions come about in terms of negotiation, people are available through the Department of Labour to assist and to advise and operate on that level. But in any agreement there can be people who don't like the agreement. For instance, there are unions who have got agreements with hospitals where there will not be any contracting out. Are we then to move with lightning-like speed and tell hospitals not to bar other businesses from doing business with the hospital? That's not the way the process operates, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Community Schools

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. Community schools have been an integral part of the education system, especially in high-needs areas such as Calgary-East. [interjections] We're always listening to your silly questions; would you please listen to my good question? They offer many programs for students and parents alike, such as ESL for new Canadians. Could the minister tell us what the future holds for community schools and the programs they provide?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly the hon. member has stated well the value of community involvement in schools and community schools. Across the province we have hundreds of community

schools, 60 of which were chartered and received special funding from the province.

MR. BRUSEKER: Sixty-six.

MR. JONSON: Sixty-six? Fine. Thank you. The funding for the 66 chartered schools has been discontinued. However, in response to community representation which goes back a couple of years and representation from groups such as the Alberta Teachers' Association, we have recognized that there are special community needs in the inner-city areas of our major cities. This year we're establishing a new grant called the enhanced opportunity grant, which will have criteria related to inner-city community schools. While I cannot guarantee that any particular inner-city community school will receive funding, the future I think is fairly bright for inner-city community schools in total.

2:20

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister indicate how these schools in high-needs areas will compete for the available funding and what criteria will be considered?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the regulations and criteria are being worked on, but I can share with the Assembly a broad outline of some of the criteria in response to the hon. member's questions. First of all, schools which have a large number of new Canadians that require particular attention with respect to English as a second language, socioeconomic parameters or statistics with respect to the city, the special needs of students in the broad sense will be considered as criteria. As I said, the criteria being what they are, the schools that need this kind of funding will qualify for the projects involved.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Wage Rollbacks

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to file four copies of a letter to the Premier from nine health care unions. This government in its own news releases has promised that cuts to health care workers would be 5 percent this year and zero in the second and third years of the plan. The government was confident that a 5 percent rollback would be reached in health care by January 1 of this year with help from the Department of Labour. The plan has failed, and health care employers are asking for 5 percent and more and more. To the Premier: when will the Premier honour his promise that rollbacks will be no more than 5 percent?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have to go back to the fundamental principle of local jurisdiction. [interjections] Well, just listen. What we have said – and the hon. member has a very interesting way of twisting . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

Hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what we said was that we were going to reduce the amount that we allocate for salaries and benefits to all sectors of the public service by 5 percent. How they work it out in their own work units is entirely up to them.

MS LEIBOVICI: Very strange, Mr. Speaker. It says here:

This is part of a three year plan running until December 31, 1996.

There will be no additional request for reductions in individuals' salaries, fees, [et cetera].

My question is: when will the Premier insist that the derailed tripartite process get back on the track again, or doesn't he understand what the process is?

MR. KLEIN: I understand. The hon. member doesn't understand. The hon. member would rather be out there in the communities of the province spreading misery and doom and gloom and fear mongering rather than participating with us and getting the facts out, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the plan is unfolding. The plan is a plan of consultation. The plan is a plan of streamlining administration. The plan is one of consolidation, and the plan is one of saving as much money as we possibly can so that the real dollars and the significant dollars can go to the patients. That's what it's all about. [interjections]

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Premier now admitting that it's okay to break a promise, that the plan was just the beginning, and that 5 percent is just the minimum?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite simply we said that we would be reducing the amount we provide for salaries and benefits by 5 percent this year, and we are doing precisely that.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Lottery Funds

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for lotteries. Over the past few years many Alberta cities and towns have seen significant development in private-sector health facilities to fill increased demand for physical fitness. These facilities are small businesses and as such pay property tax, business tax and, hopefully, income tax. Owner/operators have contacted me to express concern that while they pay for and maintain their facilities, they are faced with direct competition from nonprofit organizations who can subsidize their costs through lottery grants. Can the minister confirm that nonprofit organizations qualify for grants that for-profit organizations do not qualify for?

MR. KOWALSKI: It's certainly correct, Mr. Speaker, that the purpose of the Alberta lottery fund is to assist nonprofit organizations. We've had a great example today: the Canada Winter Games in Grande Prairie. They're essentially being funded through the Alberta lottery fund.

There are cases in the province of Alberta where nonprofit groups do receive funding from the Alberta lottery fund. I can think of the YMCA, the YWCA. I also know that our facilities like Grant MacEwan Community College here in the city of Edmonton do have recreation facilities. Grant MacEwan College, of course, is funded by the taxpayers of the province of Alberta. The public can attend and use those recreation facilities, and across the street there might be a private-sector facility that's in competition with the public one.

The hon. member is asking the question: should, in fact, none of these organizations – the universities, community schools, and the like – have funding either directly from taxpayers or from the

lottery fund? That's one that I would really look forward to debating in this Legislative Assembly. In essence, nonprofit groups are the only ones that are eligible for assistance under the lottery fund. Some of them, quite frankly, are in competition with firms in the private sector.

MR. RENNER: I wonder if the minister might consider amending grant criteria to allow any health club, whether nonprofit or for profit, to apply for lottery grants.

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, should such a matter occur, I would welcome, first of all, the debate and the discussion in this Legislative Assembly. In fact, there's a long tradition that we, on the one hand, would support voluntary organizations that are spread throughout the province of Alberta. I used the example of the Young Men's Christian Association and the Young Women's Christian Association, very actively involved in a large number of communities in the province of Alberta. The hon. member is saying that in essence they should not have access to the Alberta lottery fund for their worthy work within the community. That's a subject matter that should be put in the same context as, perhaps, the recreation facilities at the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary: should they be available to the public? It would be a matter, I think, that I would not want to make the decision on certainly on my own behalf. If this Assembly wanted to debate it and there was a motion or resolution approved by this Assembly, well, of course then I would act.

MR. RENNER: I wonder if the minister might advise on how we could best create a level playing field for all facilities that offer fitness centres throughout the province of Alberta.

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, I'm not sure that there is a level playing field on that basis. We have the case of Grant MacEwan Community College here in the city of Edmonton, which has had \$110 million of public funds put into it. It has a large facility there. The board of governors has made it a policy to make their facility open to the public in the city of Edmonton. They charge a user fee. Across the street a block away there may very well be a private-sector health club. Mr. Speaker, perhaps the only way that there's a level playing field is to ensure that these tax funded groups or lottery funded groups would in fact make sure that the user fees that they charge are on par with what would be found in the marketplace. The hon. member might want to take this up with the Young Men's Christian Association of Medicine Hat and ask them if they're prepared to raise their fees to become on par with any private-sector group in his community.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mental Health Services

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Klein government's dip and dive caravan ran through my constituency again yesterday. This time the government's attack on working Albertans resulted in the loss of another 100 health care jobs and worsened conditions for both employees and patients at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. These are the direct consequences of this government's actions. My questions are to the Minister of Health. Can the minister tell Albertans how this job loss will maintain or increase the quality of patient care for Albertans suffering from mental illness?

2:30

MRS. McCLELLAN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would want to clarify that all people who suffer from mental illness do not

require to be institutionalized. I would also want to say that that is not a very healthy perspective to put on this.

However, I would invite the hon. member to take the opportunity to discuss this issue of Alberta Hospital Edmonton with the member of his caucus who was the chair of Alberta Hospital Edmonton when they created, at least partially created, their strategic plan. What Alberta Hospital Edmonton today are doing, as I understand it, is enacting a part of the strategic plan. They are changing the configuration of workers in their facility. They are recognizing that more people can be helped more completely in the community. They are ensuring that there is a continuum of care for people to move from the acute care setting to the community, and they are creating, as I understand it, some SO other jobs that will see that transition. So this is part of a plan. It is moving people from an institutional setting to the community, which I think is laudable, and it is very much a part of Alberta Hospital Edmonton's strategic plan.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I understand the strategic plan, the community service is to precede the closure of beds, and that's not the case. My supplemental is to the same minister. How can the minister force this hospital to downsize before she can assure Albertans that there are sufficient supports available in the community?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the board and the administration at Alberta Hospital Edmonton looked at this very carefully. We have increased our funding to community agencies. Many of the mental health support groups are community agencies that are doing a very fine job. I would also remind hon. members that in January I announced that \$110 million of the dollars that were being removed from the acute care side would be going to the community. That will be part of it, and we have increased our community commitment. I would also remind the hon. member that we have had a mental health strategic advisory committee who have made some very good recommendations on how we handle the transition from acute to community. I believe this is part of their plan. I do not believe that Alberta Hospital Edmonton would be reducing beds if they did not feel that the community support was there. They take their responsibilities very seriously.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister guarantee that all of the dollars slashed from this hospital's budget will be directed for treatment services in the community so that Albertans suffering from mental illness are not simply put out on the streets?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, I rather resent the inference that all people who have a mental illness should be institutionalized. That has not been the case, and people are not put out on the streets. The fact is that many people with mental illness can function very well in the community with support. Yes, I have a commitment to ensure that the community services are there to serve those people. It is also the responsibility of Alberta Hospital Edmonton to ensure on a discharge plan that those are there. I have not heard from Alberta Hospital Edmonton that that is not the case.

MR. SPEAKER: The time for question period has expired.
The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to supplement the minister's answer in relation to persons with disabilities. For example, my department alone spends over \$400 million a year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, not again.

MR. CARDINAL: The Liberals don't want to hear that. In the next three years, Mr. Speaker, \$1.2 billion will go to persons with disabilities.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Collective Bargaining

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to use my time today to talk about collective bargaining under a system of provincial government targets. Clearly, something has to change. The old adversarial system will not work for us as it has in the past. We must keep in mind that the government is setting targets, not legislating rollbacks. Therefore, we are not putting the government at the bargaining table, but the influence is there. Now, how do unions and management handle the influence? We have to remember that unionized employees cannot roll back wages by themselves. Employees may want to take the rollback in an attempt to save jobs – a wise strategy, in my opinion. But they are not a party to the collective agreement; they are simply bound by that collective agreement. However, unions and management can comply with the wishes of the employees in this matter by voluntarily opening up the collective agreement.

What, then, is left for the real negotiations when the current agreement expires? Wage increases are out of the question. What does the union do? I believe there is a tremendous opportunity here for those unions. A union's prime demand could be this: "Mr. Employer, train your staff. Develop a training fund, receive your tax credit, upgrade, cross skill, and help us with the literacy problems that we face in the workplace." Now, in a world where employers cannot and should not guarantee lifetime employment, employers should invest in their people. I see a win/win situation here. The employer enjoys the productivity gains of a more highly skilled work force. Individual employees, more satisfied at being more productive, also feel more security knowing that they are better equipped to face the future.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Maintenance Enforcement

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to have to talk fast. Actually mine's very nonpolitical. It's on maintenance enforcement. One thing that's bothered me for some years is that our system in effect asked two spouses that couldn't agree, to the point where they broke up their marriage – one of them has to go try to collect from the other. We give maybe a little help by sometimes sending that spouse over to a maintenance enforcement agency. I don't see why we can't adopt a system that they have in both Australia and Austria, where society, or the government, pays the support payment that the court decides, up, say, to a maximum of a thousand dollars a month so we don't have any millionaires in there, and then collects it from the spouse that's supposed to pay.

Now, this has two advantages to it. First of all, the spouse that receives the money gets it regularly, keeps his or her dignity, usually hers, and can plan and pay the rent and so on and so forth.

A second advantage to that system is that it would save society a lot of money. Right now when spouses get in a fight and the money doesn't come through, quite often they end up on welfare; quite often they end up costing society money. Certainly we have a whole department here that the Minister of Justice runs that tries to collect money, not that competently to begin with. When we realize that 80 percent of spouses that are supposed to pay to the other spouse for maintenance enforcement quit in less than five years, we realize what a problem we have.

It can be done. It can be done efficiently. It's not a socialist or right-wing or left-wing system. No spouse that has to pay is going to tell the government to go to hell every month when they have to pay the cheque. After all, we have a collecting department, an income tax department, that collects from people. They could just as well collect the support payments, and the spouse receiving would have a good, steady, dignified income.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Gambling Addiction

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak today on the provision of services for problem gamblers. The need for services in this area was confirmed by results of a comprehensive study on gambling and problem gambling commissioned by Alberta lotteries and gaming which was made public at a press conference held January 31, 1994. The study found that most Albertans, about 95 percent, experienced no gambling problems. Either they don't gamble or they pursue it only as a form of entertainment. The study found that 4 percent of adult Albertans experience some degree of gambling problems, and another 1.4 percent suffer more severe gambling problems. The government has clearly acknowledged the need to assist Albertans experiencing difficulty with gambling and has designated Alberta lotteries and gaming and AADAC to initiate a plan of responsive action on behalf of government. The action plan will be phased in over a four-year period. Funding through Alberta lotteries and gaming will total about \$3.2 million over that period. This is comparable to the level of funding provided by other provinces for problem gambling services.

2:40

AADAC will receive funding from Alberta lotteries and gaming to support community-based agencies and initiatives to strengthen commission service in the problem gambling area. AADAC will also oversee provision of education, prevention, and treatment services and act as the administrative agent in providing funding, monitoring, and evaluation in support of these community-based initiatives.

We won't be creating a new bureaucracy or building new buildings. We'll be building on existing skills and services and building on the strength of Albertans and local communities. It's because of AADAC's close connection to many communities and community-based agencies and groups throughout the province that we can provide a range of integrated services for Albertans who are experiencing problems as a result of gambling or the gambling of a family member. The initiatives will be focused in the areas of education, prevention, treatment, training, and research and evaluation. A 1-800 telephone line is already in operation for anyone in crisis in immediate need.

I'll close at that. Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Government House Leader if he could inform the House as to the projected order of government business for next week.

MR. EVANS: Isn't this interesting. We're just moving right along here; aren't we?

Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker, I'd be delighted to inform members opposite of projected government business for next week. On Tuesday we reconvene after Family Day. At 4:30 in the afternoon we'll be returning to the throne speech debate. It's proposed then in the evening, under Government Bills and Orders, that we would move to third reading of Bill 7, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1994, and after third reading to return to second reading of government Bills in the order of 2, 3, 4, and 6.

On Wednesday evening we are projecting Royal Assent to Bill 7 at 8 p.m. and then a return to Government Bills and Orders, again dependent upon how much progress we've made up to that point.

On February 24, Thursday, following question period the House would adjourn to 4 p.m., and we would then reconvene to hear the budget speech by our hon. colleague the Provincial Treasurer.

This is the projected government business for next week, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

Did the hon. Member for Fort McMurray wish to raise a point of order?

MR. GERMAIN: I won't be pursuing my point of order this afternoon, sir.

Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Call the committee to order.

Bill 7

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1994

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question has been asked. Are you ready?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

[The sections of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

MR. DINNING: Now I will move that the Bill be reported, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion carried]

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

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain Bill. The committee reports the following: Bill 7.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

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

Bill 4

Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, 1994

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

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 4 proposes some amendments to the Employment Standards Code, and the purpose of this really is to streamline the legislation to allow for some cost recovery and to also allow for some reciprocal agreements outside of Canada. These amendments will benefit the Alberta work force as a whole and will also save taxpayers money just in terms of administration and some of the streamlining. I'll just cover the main principles so people can have an idea of where some of this streamlining and cost recovery will be taking place and how it will be effective.

In the area of cost recovery itself the legislation is considered permissive, meaning that the department will be permitted to bring in regulations that will allow it to collect fees for certain services. This is quite an important point. I don't want people to think there's going to be a charging of fees to employees who want to file complaints or for investigations. That is absolutely not the approach that's being taken here. Rather, these fees and regulations will give Labour the room to set certain regulations and fees. The type of things that could be included: for instance, right now a variety of information and education publications is available. There's a possibility, if the government wants to, if Labour wants to, to be able to charge fees for those strictly on a user-pay basis. Courses and seminars are provided and made available to people in the whole area of employment standards and work relationships. That allows again for the possibility for charges for these courses and seminars. It doesn't mean it will happen; it just means the possibility of it is there.

2:50

I just need to repeat that employees will not be asked to pay for investigations or other aspects relating to the filing of a complaint. There may be situations in a very small percentage of cases related to either employers or employees where a director or an officer may deem there's some frivolous activity. Then, as you'll see in certain specific elements of the Bill, there are ways to assume some costs and to assess some costs just to put some balance into the whole operation, into the whole approach. I have to emphasize again: that very small percentage. We talk about small percentages. Our estimation is probably somewhat less than 1 percent even of businesses in Alberta that would be affected and deemed in this category and a similar ratio, less than 1 percent, in terms of employees. So it makes a provision, but because regulations are allowed to be made, there will not be anything happening at all which would in any way see fees assessed to an employee who's filing a complaint.

There's an area of collection that sometimes causes difficulty whereby an award can be made to an employee and everything recognized and done, and then the employee has no ability to collect that particular award. It becomes very difficult to do that. So again reflecting the whole approach of government moving services outside of government and to privatization, third party agencies would be allowed to collect judgments from an employer and also to see the employer assessed a fee for the collection of that judgment. Under current legislation a collection agency can collect only the amount of the judgment, and the agency's fee would come out of that amount. So in effect what was happening was that it was costing the employee. An employee had a duly awarded judgment, and it wound up in an indirect way as a cost to the employee. This will make sure there's no cost to the employee but will allow that outside agency to do the collecting. The employer will pay that agency fee.

In cases where an employer wants to appeal against a particular judgment – again, it's a very small percentage, but in these cases it's the employee that's left out in the cold, as it were. Sometimes what can happen is that an employer can still be delinquent even when they lose an appeal. So now the employer must first submit the full amount of the original order, whatever's been assessed following due process. The employer wishing to appeal must put up the amount of the order plus an administration fee. As an example, if there was an employer who was ordered to pay an employee a thousand dollars and that employer then wanted to appeal, he or she would have to submit the thousand dollars and the associated fees. That would be kept in trust until the outcome of the appeal. Then obviously if the employer wins, the money is returned, but if the employer loses, the money is readily available to be awarded to the employee. Currently the deposit is just equal to the amount of the order to a maximum of \$300, and sometimes that creates a burden on the employee who then has to try and retrieve that money. This way the money would be held up front in trust. If the employer loses the appeal, then it goes over to the employee, and there's some considerable saving there – not just a saving to the employee but a saving to government, which has to get involved in some of the follow-up process, which can be very lengthy at times trying to recover these particular orders.

In terms of streamlining, employees are going to be asked now to file their claims within six months of their termination date – within six months of termination. Right now there is no time limit, and that can create quite a paper trail. If there's quite a period of time, even years that go by, an employer can make a case in terms of record keeping that may not be available. Now with the six-month limit, with the employee having to file within six months of termination, it puts the responsibility on the employee. It also puts the responsibility on the employer to make sure that he or she has those records, because it really couldn't be argued that six months was too long a period of time for an employer to go back to get those records. So there's going to be some increased responsibility on the employer and on the employee.

Also, the employment standards officers will have the power to refuse what they would deem as frivolous claims. In that process, however – I want to make this clear – they would advise the individual, be it an employer or an employee, that the claim was deemed to be frivolous. Even if an officer does that, the employee or employer can still appeal that particular decision.

There's also some wording that's going to be clarified to reflect the new structure in our department. In Labour's new team-based structure, because we operate on a team and not a strict hierarchical approach, the word "director" is no longer a specific individ-

ual, so there'll be some accommodation there to reflect that change.

There'll also be some reciprocal agreements, and this legislation is going to allow the department to strike up agreements with other jurisdictions outside of Canada. Again it's a very small percentage of cases where this happens, but if there is an employer who has a judgment and then skips the province, many times that can leave Alberta employees unpaid. By allowing a reciprocal agreement to be struck, these dollars now could be collected from employers followed to other jurisdictions. Because it's reciprocal, that would mean also that employers from other jurisdictions who have left unpaid orders from other areas and moved to Alberta – then this would allow a collection from the employers who have moved to Alberta but haven't fulfilled their obligations elsewhere.

What we're seeing, Mr. Speaker, is an overall attempt at streamlining, an attempt at reducing administration, and an attempt at bringing increased awareness and responsibility to both parties. Our belief clearly is that Alberta should be and possibly is even now the most attractive place to do business in this country. A lot of that has to do with striking harmony in the workplace and increasing one's sense of respect for the other party and also increasing one's sense of responsibility. It's for those reasons I've already named that we're moving in this direction. Those are the principles. I'd be happy to listen to any concerns that may be addressed and will look forward to the committee stage where we can get into specifics on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the overview given by the hon. Minister of Labour. I think generally the idea of streamlining this process is in the correct direction. There are a couple of issues, though, that kind of sprang to mind as I read through the Bill, and I'd like to pose those to the minister in the hope that when we get to the closing statements, perhaps the minister might address them.

The six-month concept I think is a tightening up that is a good move, but I was wondering in particular under section 92. It talks about: notwithstanding anything in the Act an officer may choose not to accept a complaint. I guess I'm thinking and speaking now from the viewpoint of perhaps being the complainant. Many times these are individuals who for whatever reason feel hard done by. They feel that they've been shorted either on regular pay or vacation pay or overtime pay, as is outlined in various pieces of the legislation. I was trying to put myself in that kind of a position. I've been fortunate that I've never been in that kind of a position. I thought that if I were to put forward a complaint and the response I got back from an officer was, "Sorry, I'm not going to investigate that," I would want to know why.

In both section 92 and, further on, in section 97 there's no indication that an officer shall explain the reasons why an investigation was not launched or a complaint wasn't followed up. I understand that from the other side of the coin, from being an investigator, there certainly are difficulties at times when there is simply not enough evidence to work with. But I think it's important, in an attempt to really resolve the whole complaint, the dispute resolution mechanism, that there has to be understanding given so both sides understand what the other person's point of view is. Nowhere in here does it say that if a complaint isn't accepted, the reasons are given to the complainant why it's not. I think if that were tightened up somehow – and I think back to complaints that I read about from time to time in government news releases with respect to the Human Rights Commission. It seems

that there's a negotiation that goes on, and at the end of most of those there's a one- or two-line sentence that says: the matter was resolved in such and such a fashion. I guess I would feel more comfortable if in some way that was included in this process, that somehow there could be a resolution that when you get to the end, the resolution is a wrapping up, I guess, a concluding kind of a statement – and I don't see that in here – particularly from the viewpoint of the individual, the employee who often perceives himself or herself to be the low person on the totem pole. Sometimes when you go to take on city hall, as it were, as the expression goes, you often feel like the deck is stacked against you. I'd like to see that perhaps corrected a little bit in here, or if the minister could address if that would be dealt with in the resolutions process.

3:00

The appeals and so on that are in the area and the appointment of umpires I think are probably a step in the correct direction, and I notice that the penalties that are imposed in the very last section referred to in Bill 4 are significantly more substantial than what they had been. Certainly in this day and age, given the unfortunate devaluation of our dollar with respect to where it was in 1960, for example, and its buying power, I think the figures are a little more realistic: upping them from \$10,000 to \$100,000 and from \$5,000 to \$50,000.

I think, generally, the intent put forward in this Bill is a step in the right direction. I think we need to ensure that employees get the protection they need with situations whereby their employment is terminated, and I think we also have in this, as far as I can tell, a balance with respect to the employers. So I think it is a step in the right direction. Perhaps a minor change or clarification needs to be made, but overall it looks like a good one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an interesting Bill that's been put forward by the Minister of Labour. It goes hand in hand with Bill 1, which also talks about some minor restructuring within the Labour department yet leaves out some significant details.

One of the things that I've noticed and that the minister confirmed in question period a couple of days ago was with regard to this idea of cost recovery: that it is an attempt to make both the Labour Relations Board as well as the employment standards section of the Labour department self-financing and self-funding. It begs the question in terms of: what is the role of government these days? What are the areas the government should in fact be providing services?

One of the things that I'm not sure if all the hon. members are aware of is that the Employment Standards Code is for individuals who are nonunionized. In other words, they do not have an organized body that looks at protecting their rights, and in certain instances you may be talking about a one- or a two-employee shop. What the Employment Standards Code does is try to ensure there are minimum standards across the province that employers need to adhere to.

I have a few concerns with the Bill, on a cursory overview of it. I know that second reading is not, unless I'm mistaken, to get into the individual particulars on a clause-by-clause basis, and I welcome that opportunity to do that as well, particularly to look at the regulations. I think that is an area that needs to be addressed before we determine the viability of this Bill, but I'd just like to provide a bit of an overview in terms of what the concerns are

going to be from the opposition. One of the concerns, and I've noticed this as well in the labour relations Act that's proposed, is that the director as well as, I believe, the chair of the Labour Relations Board are designated by the minister. I have a question in terms of: why is that not a public designation? Why does that not go through the public process of appointments? Why does that need to be done in seclusion, as it were? Again, I'm not going to go through clause by clause, but I just wanted to point that out because I would appreciate an answer to that, if we can, before we even get into the clause by clause.

I know that there was – and I have asked the minister about this in the past – an employment standards symposium held under the former Minister of Labour and that there were invited participants from across the province who attended that symposium. We still have not seen the results of that symposium, and I think that that would be interesting in determining what the recommendations were and how those recommendations jibe with the amendments that are currently before us.

It seems that there's a thrust in this particular Act with regards to abusers, and of course that begs the question as to whether we are making a mountain out of a molehill. What are the exact percentages of individuals who do abuse the system? Are those sufficient numbers to necessitate the changes that are within the Act?

I've had questions of me with respect to: does this mean – and I believe that the minister addressed part of that, and I must excuse myself that I did not hear all of the answer due to being in transit, as it were – that this is not a Bill that will end up costing fees for services? Well, if that's the case, why isn't that clear within the Act? To me, what this legislation allows is the ability at some point in time, whether it's this year or next year or four years down the road, maybe after the next election, to in fact charge, because it says in here that "the Director [is able] to charge fees for the purpose of recovering all or part of the costs . . . in administering" and this includes "without limitation" audits, filing of complaints, applications, investigation and mediation of complaints, processing of appeals. It seems to cover the gamut for the charging.

Again, I'd like to point out that this is an Act that covers nonunionized employees. So you might well have a case of an individual who has been wrongfully dismissed by his or her employer looking at filing an appeal or requesting an investigation into that dismissal, has no funds available because they are in fact dismissed by the employer, and in order to pursue their case would have to pay fees. If the intent is not to allow that to happen, then I would like to see perhaps between this reading and when we get into the clause by clause an amendment made so that it is very clear that that is not the intent.

Again it's interesting to note the items that have been left out, left on the Order Paper or left perhaps to bring back into the session. In this particular session is the question of Family Day. I would have thought that if we were looking at amendments to the Employment Standards Code, this would be the place to do it so that we could engage in a discussion around that particular item and that, in fact, we could then provide time for both employers and employees to make adjustments, if that's required, for the coming year. I would like to know whether these are the only amendments we will see in the Employment Standards Code and, again if I may be so bold as to make that same request, with regards to the Labour Relations Code so that we're not picking and choosing and coming back and forth on these Acts but know that these are the final revisions that will be proposed for this particular session.

There are a number of items, that I will just list, that arise when looking at the Bill that have not been addressed. One is: who will pay? Is it employer or employee? The regulations: as I mentioned before, there was some talk about frivolous. I don't know and perhaps the minister does: again, what are the guidelines for being frivolous? Who makes that judgment, and what are the appeal processes? It appears that it's the officer that sits as both judge and jury, and I question whether that is the best way to go. There is some mention about an independent body. Again, what does that mean? Are we looking at privatizing the whole employment standards branch, and will investigators then be either lawyers or consultants who set up shop? What is the intent with regards to the investigation aspect?

One of the complaints that my colleagues and myself get the most is in terms of not having enough investigators with regards to employment standards. We may debate here the pros and the cons of the Act, but let's just say that the Act as it is does not, in essence, allow for enough enforceability, and I think part of that is the fact that there may be not enough investigators.

3:10

I think that the question of user pay may or may not be fair. I'm not willing to pass judgment on that. My greatest concern – and this is user pay with regards to the frivolous aspect – is whether genuine cases may then not be brought to the attention of the employment standards branch. There is of course the question with this as with other user pay systems that in fact what we are having is a hidden tax increase for those individuals that are going to be applying to have an employment standards case looked at.

One of the things that I found surprising in the Act was with regards to education. It appears that now people will have to pay for being educated around employment standards. Perhaps I've misread the Act with regards to that, and I'm sure that if I have, the minister will set me straight. My understanding again out of the employment standards symposia that were held is that there were strong recommendations about the big need for education. Again we're looking at shops which are not unionized. We're looking at small business, and I don't think that it is a fair principle to require that these individuals need to pay for being educated with regards to employment standards that are put forward by the province.

There's a question in terms of what happens if an employee – and I think this is a little hazy – has consulted a lawyer, whether the case will be handled through the umpire or employment standards. Perhaps if the minister again can provide some clarification on that.

Fees: is there going to be a range of fees? Again, will they be in the regulations, and how do they determine whether an individual is able to pay? Will there be some kind of a means test assessed? I think the notion that must be front and centre: fees should not be a barrier for the enforcement of rights. [interjections] Thank you for the applause. If the Assembly will just allow me a little more time.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sure.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you.

The other questions that I'd like to bring forward I initially brought forward with regards to Family Day: stronger enforcement provisions; perhaps the need for more officers; the question with regards to individuals who may not be able to afford the payment of services; the collection of payments; who, in essence, will do that; whether we will be hiring individuals that will collect. With regards to the six months after termination, on initial glance

that may be a good idea for both the employee and the employer to recognize that there is a time frame within which to file a complaint. Some of the greatest concerns, as I've indicated before, are in terms of the officer making the decision as to what complaint is "frivolous or vexatious." Those are interesting terms that are used and no definition for those terms anywhere within the Act.

I notice that in section 112 – and, again, if the minister might be able to explain this to the House – that the word "province" is stricken from the current legislation and replaced with "jurisdiction." I'm not sure why, and I found that interesting. I also notice in section 122 that the fees have increased by an inordinate amount. I think that if you were looking at an individual who is, again, nonunionized, who is probably working at close to minimum wage, who may well be working part-time, who may well be a single parent, who is looking at a complaint and is guilty of an offence is liable to a \$50,000 fine. I'm not sure actually, when I look at this again, whether when it says in the case of an individual, that is pinpointing the employee or the employer. Employer?

MR. DAY: Yes.

MS LEBOVICI: Okay. In that case, I think that if you're looking at a small business, it may still be substantial.

Those are my comments to this point in time. I'd like to reserve the ability to get up and speak further either during this particular reading or when we look at it on a clause-by-clause basis.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 4 is an interesting legislative initiative, and I say interesting because it gives us occasion once again to wonder why the government that touts it's listening and caring, why that isn't reflected in the kind of legislative initiatives that they bring in front of the House. If the government were truly listening and caring, I would have expected that what we would have seen addressed in Bill 4 would have been whistle-blower protection. We would have seen many of the other points that have been raised by my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark. Those are concerns that people in the marketplace, both employers and employees, have. None of those concerns, on a quick reading of Bill 4, have been addressed in the Bill. Now, that's not to say that we should reject out of hand the suggestions in Bill 4. But it's somewhat puzzling. When we open a piece of legislation to make amendment to it, one would expect we'd sit down, catalogue the shortcomings in the Bill, and try to address them at one time. It makes sense. It's efficient. At the same time, Albertans are focused on trying to improve this part of the government apparatus. Why don't we do the whole thing? Why do we sort of hive off an element here and an element there? So I register my disappointment that the scope of Bill 4 is too narrow and too limited.

Four other specific concerns I have with Bill 4, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I want to address the principle. I'm not an advocate of privatization in any circumstance at any cost. Neither am I opposed to privatization in many cases. We may each define government's role somewhat differently, but I'd think most of us would say that at base, at core, government has a responsibility to provide protection for Albertans. Different kinds of services can be delivered by the private sector, but in terms of protection I think most people look to the government and see that as being a core responsibility of the provincial government. I feel some

concern here that there's undue haste in terms of shedding this kind of supervisory responsibility.

The problem that I think most employees who would be subject to the Employment Standards Code have is not that there aren't user fees in the code. It's that they're faced with two problems. The first one is that most of these workers can't go in and retain a lawyer on a private retainer basis . . .

MR. DAY: Lower your fees, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Well, we do what we can, Mr. Speaker, but all lawyers are not so charitable.

What we run into is a situation where too many workers who have been deprived of wages or some type of compensation find they can't afford to hire a lawyer on a private retainer, that there isn't civil legal aid to assist them in a case like that, so their only other recourse is to go under the Employment Standards Code. I can't tell members how many times employees have come to me or to lawyers I've worked with and we send them off to employment standards because it doesn't make sense for them to spend all of those moneys in legal fees. The reaction you get then – it may be a week or two weeks later when you'll get aggrieved workers coming back, and the complaint they register is: they've been told by employment standards that it's going to be another four weeks or another six weeks before they're able to address their concerns. That, I think, is the real issue that has to be addressed. You know, there's nothing in here that addresses that. I'm afraid I wasn't present when the minister introduced the Bill, and perhaps he told us that this is a way to compress the time from initial complaint until resolution or disposition, but I don't see that expressed as a purpose in the Bill. There's nothing apparent in the text of the Bill that tells us that that important objective is going to be achieved. So what I see, on the one hand, are the continued delays with aggrieved workers trying to get compensation to be made whole and now the potential impediment of some type of a user fee being put in their path.

3:20

Anyway, I said I had four issues. The first one was this whole question of principle. The second one has to deal with this very broad discretion that is given to the director in terms of determining fees. I think when I look at, I guess, section 6 and the provision to amend section 76, one of the things that's going to be determined by the directors is: who will be liable to pay these fees? Now, that's a pretty basic question. It's one thing to say that the employer is going to be stuck with these costs, but it's clear it's been left open so that some or all of these costs can be levied on the employee, the complainant, the aggrieved party. Now, the problem there is that if you look at what's happened in other jurisdictions, particularly when they've dealt with freedom of information, they've decided that fees are so important and potentially can be such a deterrent to access by members of the public that they should be specified in the Bill, not in regulation, not in some order by a bureaucrat at some point that appears in the *Gazette*, but they should be actually prescribed in the statute. I think that's an important consideration. I think what's true in many provinces, in many states or jurisdictions that have gone with freedom of information, the same consideration should apply here; shouldn't it? I mean, shouldn't we expect that here if we're anxious there not be impediments? I'm confident that the last thing the Minister of Labour wants to do is make it tougher, make it slower, make it more awkward for an aggrieved employee to be made whole, yet the potential is there with this amendment (h) to section 76 that a director may impose, may create a tariff of fees that results in a substantial impediment.

I would have hoped that if we're looking at some kind of a cost recovery basis – and I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to say that there should never be any circumstance where an employee should be required to pay something – it seems to me that there has to be more to it than just sort of giving this enormous responsibility to the director and saying: well, sir or madam, it's whatever you deign appropriate. I mean, I don't find that acceptable because it means that a nonelected person, not somebody in this House who's supposed to be accountable, then has the opportunity to create barriers and create impediments.

Another point, the third item I wanted to raise is that there's no power to waive fees in all of the freedom of information legislation, which I think is analogous. I'm delighted to see at least the Member for Peace River here. The Member for Peace River takes extensive notes and certainly took extensive notes at all our freedom of information sessions, was keenly, keenly concerned on what the cost would be to the consumer in terms of accessing a government service. He, I think, taught me how important it is that we be sensitive to any potential impediments when it comes to fees, and I took instruction from that Member for Peace River when he focused on the power in the appropriate case for the government to be able to waive fees where that's appropriate. That's not provided for, unfortunately, regrettably, in Bill 4. It ought to be.

[Mr. Sohal in the Chair]

The other item I go on to raise, the final point, has to deal with section 92(4)(a)(ii). Now, what we've got here is an officer. It's not the minister, it's not a director. We have an officer who's going to determine that he "may refuse to accept or investigate a complaint." What would his basis be for refusing? Well, he could find that "there is insufficient evidence to substantiate the complaint." Now, I thought the job of the employment standards people was to do the investigation, but implicit in this amendment is that the employee not only goes and registers the complaint but has to present a packet of evidence, has to have the photographs, the affidavit material, the statutory declarations, the photographs of the worksite, the list of names of witnesses. I wouldn't have thought that that would be what government would say to a complainant: you have to come and do this work for us. Isn't that what the user fee is going to be paid for? So it seems to me, with respect, that it's one thing to say that a complaint can be dismissed if it's "frivolous or vexatious." It may be one thing to say that there's already another remedy being pursued and you would be silly to have a duplicitous proceeding going on. But to say that there's insufficient evidence, I mean, that just truly puts the cart before the horse and makes absolutely no sense to me. It's something I can't support. If there's an explanation . . . [interjection] Well, I understand that there's at least one member that doesn't understand the point, so I'll go over it one more time, Mr. Speaker, so maybe it's a little clearer. If you have a complaint, members, and you want to be able to take it to the employment standards board, you want to be able to have them do the investigation after giving them some preliminary information. That's not provided for in section 92 of Bill 4 as amended.

Now, the other point I make, sir, looking at section 92(4)(a)(iii): now, once again it's not the director, it's not the minister, people who are accountable in a more public way, but it's simply an officer who can decide, presumably in his or her sole discretion, that if

there are other means available to the employee to deal with the subject-matter . . . before the complaint is accepted or investigated, the officer can refuse to investigate. Well, there's almost always a legal remedy, Mr. Minister. There's almost always a legal

remedy. But as I've tried to explain before, there are substantial practical problems why people can't use that legal remedy. So it's cold comfort to my prospective client who's come to me and I've already sent off to employment standards for a hopefully cost-effective means of getting redress to then be told by the officer, who happens to have a lot of files on his desk already and wants to go home and the last thing he needs is another case: "Well, go and see a lawyer. You've got a legal remedy here, and you can pursue this thing on your own. You don't belong here." Once again we've got a second obstacle here to Albertans getting access to a kind of service that I think we all think we pay for, that we contribute to in our taxes and now perhaps even in terms of user fees.

MS LEIBOVICI: An essential service.

MR. DICKSON: An essential service, as I'm reminded. Of course it's an essential service.

3:30

Now, the last thing I'd like to say, in fact, is a compliment, and it's not a criticism. The six-month requirement to advance a complaint I think is not unreasonable provided that, as the minister has done here, we provide provision for the director to be able to extend the six-month period where appropriate. I think that's fair. I find it interesting that the director here has the power to extend that sort of thing, and we're going to involve the director in that kind of a determination, but we don't involve him in that other determination of when we dismiss a complaint because we think that they should be issuing a statement of claim and going to the civil courts. It's just the officer who makes the decision that there's insufficient evidence to substantiate the complaint. So, Mr. Speaker, those are the concerns I have.

I make a general observation, and I've said it on other Bills. When we see the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the partisan of privatization, and we see this concept manifest in all kinds of government initiatives, I always have the same concern, and the concern is this: once again we have central government services that are being delivered further and further away from the Legislature. The degree of responsibility that we have as MLAs gets undercut one more time and in another way. I think that if my constituents in Calgary-Buffalo have got a beef or a problem with the way the employment standards office works, they expect that if they come to me, I can either stand up or I'll phone the minister or I'll be bivouacked in his office or I'll ask him here in the House. They expect that he's going to be able to provide responses, as we're finding more and more of these protective services, essential services, being farmed out further and further away. It's an erosion again on the kind of responsibility that we have in our system of government, the kind of responsibility we've had in this province in the past. It's not addressed in Bill 4, it isn't addressed in some of the other privatization initiatives, and it certainly ought to be, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I had not planned to speak to this Bill this afternoon and believed it was coming later. As a result, if there is any abruptness or hesitation in my comments this afternoon, I ask your indulgence.

I want, however, to indicate to the House and remind the House that during question period earlier today, a concern was expressed

relating to those people who attempt to assist the Premier with his voluntary wage cutback and then in fact immediately thereafter lose their jobs. I urged the Premier to move with lightning speed to prevent that abuse, and both the Premier, with respect, and the Minister of Labour, with respect, did not think, at least in their oral articulations at that time, that there was a way in which they could move with lightning speed to prevent that abuse. I want to suggest to the Minister of Labour this afternoon that there is indeed a way to do that, and that way is found immediately in Bill 4, which is under discussion right this very minute.

Let me articulate the proposition this way. In the economic times that are upon us in this province and without debating again and raising a crescendo of catcalls and concerns, without debating why we are in that economic situation in this province today, without debating that, it is very clear to all Albertans that things are not rolling very smoothly in this province. Now, that's not gloom and doom. In fact, as a businessman I'm an optimist. Who else but an optimist would be in business year after year after year facing government regulation, government taxation, top-heavy government that will not contract itself? Who else, Mr. Speaker, but an optimist would be in business? I say that as an optimist, but it is not inappropriate for an optimist to say that things are not perking as well as they should be, and that is not doom and gloom. It is an assessment of the economic reality.

So a cry went out from the Premier to ask people to take a voluntary 5 percent wage cut. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that across the width and breadth of this province for different reasons and under different compulsions many people took that 5 percent wage cut. If they took that 5 percent wage cut effective January 1, and they lost their job February 1, then the severance package they would get would be based on the reduced wage that they were getting. [interjection] I'm sorry. Were you trying to catch my attention?

Point of Order Relevance

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: What?

MR. DAY: Just listen. I'm trying to be diligent and take notes on each point being raised by the members, and some good points have been raised, and I'm doing that. Just on the question of relevance. The member keeps referring to the Premier's request.

MR. WHITE: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it a point of order? Then he may rise.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Your point of order, what's the citation there?

MR. DAY: Sections 1081 to 1083 in *Beauchesne*.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Proceed with the point of order.

MR. DAY: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that the member is referring at length to the Premier's comments in a request to the public service, which is unionized. The Employment Standards Code does not deal at all with that particular body of people, so I think it's an area of misunderstanding. I don't think he's deliberately taking up the time, but that therefore makes that irrelevant. We

need to deal with the employees who are under the Employment Standards Code, not those who are in the public service.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, 1081 and 1083 have nothing to do with what the hon. minister was just talking about, so if there's anybody just wasting time . . .

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Yes. Thank you. It is true that the minister may have an argument that the Employment Standards Code does not apply to the civil service, but in fact in section 2 some sections of the Act do apply to all employees and employers. As a result, there would be an argument that his cutting of this legislation is a little bit too narrow. In any event, the employment standards Act could very easily be amended right now in this opportunity for the minister to move with lightning speed to close this loophole. That is required. That was my point. It was relevant, and it's relevant to the people of Alberta.

I would like your permission to continue.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray, continue, please.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you. I appreciate that ruling, sir.

Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: Section 26 of this particular piece of legislation could be amended right now – we are right here – to indicate that where someone has taken a voluntary cutback, where this legislation applies, and indeed where this legislation does not yet apply but expanded to include those missing links – if they take such a voluntary cutback, they will not have that reduced wage used in their severance package if they are fired. We can pick a period of time, perhaps within three or four or five months of taking that voluntary rollback. That is the point I was trying to make. The minister is here now with this piece of legislation. It will be quicker to solve this problem right now in this piece of legislation with what I would expect, Mr. Speaker, will be the unanimous consent of this Legislature. I don't think there is a single person in this Legislative Assembly that feels good about somebody volunteering to take a wage increase then immediately thereafter losing their job and having their two or three or four or five or six weeks of severance pay based on the 95 percent figure rather than the 100 percent figure they enjoyed before. This piece of legislation is here before us in debate now. Let's make it work. When we have big government, let's not throw up our hands and say: big government has no solutions. Let's make it work.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Let me also continue, if I might, and suggest to the minister – who I noticed earlier was thumbing through the piece of legislation, Bill 4, thumbing through it – that he might go back to the original and insert those provisions in both section 26 and section 57 and try and make it apply.

3:40

I want to echo an additional comment that was made by my learned friend from Calgary-Buffalo, and that is the waiver of fees where it is just and equitable to do so. We are in a time in this particular province where we are facing increased difficulty, and people feel disenfranchised from their right of speech and right of

activity and right to pursue their remedies because the fees involved destroy their confidence to proceed with their initiatives. I would say to the government and to the hon. minister that from a practical point of view there has to be an adjustment, presumably in some of the fees. This appears to be the direction the government has taken instead of general tax increases. They appear to have made a decision to move more and more of these procedures into a user-pay approach. That's their approach, and they've expressed that. Well, I say then: give the people who need the help the most a relief valve, an escape point. I re-echo the very eloquently put phraseology of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Finally, I want to draw the Assembly's attention to section 28 of the initial legislation. Now, Mr. Speaker, there is no sense fumbling through Bill 4, because there is no reference to section 28 in this Bill that I can see. Now, section 28 has been a very useful piece of legislation. What section 28 allows an employee and an employer to do – and I know that the minister will find this is relevant, because I am speaking specifically of the employment standards Act and speaking specifically of section 28 in it. What that section does is allow an employee and an employer to get together for the purpose of cutting their own deal in what the job conditions are going to be. How many hours are they going to work? Are they going to work a compressed work week? Are they going to work six or seven days in a row? How are they going to handle their interpersonal/work relationship? But there is a tiny, weeny fly in that ointment, Mr. Speaker. Since we are here at the employment standards Bill 4 now, and it's here before us now, there is the tiny fly in that ointment that can be corrected.

What has happened in the past in Alberta is this. Mr. Speaker, employees and employers will in fact cut their deal. They'll make their deal, but they will not reduce it to writing. As a result, if they do not reduce that deal to writing, that deal can go on and on and on by practice and by custom so that it's clear to everybody what the deal is. But then the relationship between the two sours. The employee and the employer come to verbal blows, and one of them leaves the operation. Usually since the employer is carrying the debt on the operation, he can't leave, so it's the employee who's obliged to leave. What then happens is a ferocious and bitter lawsuit where somebody comes forward and says, "I want 7,958 hours of overtime at double time because we did not have a written agreement." I would ask the minister to consider very carefully whether section 28 should be amended to provide in those corporations that have less than 20 or 30 employees that in lieu of a written agreement an adjudicator can look to custom and practice and the pattern of the employee and the employer for his answers as to whether those two had cut a deal. In one bold stroke there the Minister of Labour would have solved what is a bit of an irritant in employee/employer relationships in this particular province.

I am about to sit down, and I know that there will be others ready . . . [some applause] Mr. Speaker, the members of this Assembly should know that I have skin as thick as a water buffalo, so they cannot. . .

AN HON. MEMBER: About the same size too.

MR. BRUSEKER: A low blow.

MR. GERMAIN: A low blow. Another. Mr. Speaker, you see another intimidating shot about the fact that the desks here in this Assembly are too narrow.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

AN HON. MEMBER: You wore him out.

MR. SPEAKER: Don't let me interrupt.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's fine.

That's right. One of my learned colleagues has pointed out that I've now worked my way through all three of the Speakers this afternoon, sir. I hope that there's not a message for me in that.

I want to close by pointing out and re-echoing the very astute observation of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo that section 92 as it will be amended provides an officer with much discretion to bounce a complaint out of the water before it even takes sail and before it even gets moving. How many times in our lives, Mr. Speaker, have we learned that something that sounds frivolous today becomes the law of the land the next day? As a result, I would urge the minister to consider very carefully whether section 92 as it will come into the new legislation, if this Bill is passed, should have an escape hatch, an appeal procedure, one step higher up the food chain, if I could use that expression, in the options available to an employee or an employer.

With those closing comments, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to relinquish my time to other members of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. BENIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to speak on the second reading of Bill 4, the Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, 1994, which I gather shall be administered by the Minister of Labour, who is also the minister of the Workers' Compensation Board, I find it interesting that as I look on page 2, section 6, the provision of charging fees to individuals and companies is very interesting the way it's worded. It reminds one of the Workers' Compensation Act, which is quite interesting, and I'd like to draw a parallel because it is very significant. In the WCB there is an appeal process on fees within the system. You can appeal twice. You cannot go outside the system. Here there also doesn't appear to be an appeal mechanism outside the system. It gives quite massive powers to a director appointed by the minister to charge whatever fees he feels would cover the costs. Costs is not defined in precise terms. It includes conducting audits of the employer's records, but that's also wide open. How often do you conduct these audits, et cetera, the filing fees, et cetera?

Before going on, Mr. Speaker, I just raise this issue on the financing side because I would like from you a ruling. When the Bills were being introduced, I believe it was yesterday or the day before yesterday – I'm referring to section 79 in Standing Orders – when the minister of community affairs, I believe that's the proper title, attempted to introduce Bill 2, you inquired if he had received the approval of the Lieutenant Governor because it was perceived to be a money Bill. Here we have a Bill that brings in massive taxing power, fee assessments, in an area that was not before covered.

So my question to you, Mr. Speaker: under 79(1) and 79(2) is this Bill a money Bill in your perception, considering that fees, wide open fees, will now be charged? I refer you to section 6. It talks about

authorizing the Director to charge fees for the purpose of recovering all or part of the costs of the Government in administering this Part, and it names a number of items. Subsection (i): "authorizing an umpire to make orders for the payment of the costs," and it goes on. Then in (j): "authorizing a person (other than an employee or agent of [government]) who, on behalf of an employee," that is the government, "collects money." That person has massive power to determine how much fees will be charged. This is a very wide-

open provision. It's like driving a gravel truck down a very, very narrow sidewalk.

I ask, Mr. Speaker, for your ruling before continuing.

3:50

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair will take note of the hon. member's question, but the Chair is not prepared to make an immediate response. The member may proceed, and the Chair undertakes to inquire into the member's concern to see if there is any basis for it.

MR. BENIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on the points which I started to raise when I brought up section 79, I will concentrate on the financial side. There is here a massive, massive opportunity to abuse a system. We as legislators have a responsibility to the people of this province, employers, employees, to make sure that the laws that are passed through this House are just, are fair, and are understandable when conflicts arise. Here we have a Bill that throws it wide open to one person, an autocrat, one person, a director, if there is a dispute, an umpire. [interjections]

The temptation, Mr. Speaker, is very strong to respond to the heckling. I'm restraining myself, for how long I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to explain how he will implement subsection (h), giving so much power to a director that he will appoint. What power will he have over the fees that the director will determine? What power, what authority, what instructions will he give to the umpire for how a dispute over the fees assessed will be remedied? Is he going to allow it to go into the court system, which is not, for example, permitted under the Act he also administers known as the Workers Compensation Board? Would he have any control over an individual or a company that the umpire or director names to collect the money, a collection agency, that has here massive powers to determine what fees will be charged? Now, it's one thing to say that they will be reasonable fees, but what is reasonable is a big question, because if the fees were not in dispute, they would have been reasonable. The minute a fee is in dispute, it is assumed that one side does not feel it a reasonable fee.

I would also like to draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that in the last session Bill 10 was not passed. Bill 10 dealt with registries. Here we have in 17.1 a section where

the Director may engage persons to perform services for and otherwise assist the Director and officers in administering this Part, and those persons are entitled to the fees established in or pursuant to regulations under section 76(k).

We see here a provision for privatizing, privatizing a section that has a wide-open fee schedule. These are very serious concerns.

This appears to be a money Bill by another name. Putting the money section to the side, which is a very serious situation that should automatically result in this Bill not passing, other sections should have more clout to be able to serve not only the employers, the employees, everybody in this province that has to resort to the assistance based on this Act.

Under section 1082, Second Reading of a Private Bill, there is a clause here, subsection (1): "the House affirms the principle of the Bill, conditionally subject to the proof of such allegations."

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this Bill in second reading because of the money provisions. It is probably – and I await your judgment – a money Bill, and therefore it should not have been brought in the way it was on behalf of the Minister of Labour. So I would personally be voting against this Bill, and I would urge all members in this House to also vote against it. It provides too many problems in the future for the government, for

the people, for the employers. I realize that the Minister of Labour, who is also responsible for the WCB, may enjoy provisions like this because he hasn't brought in any amendments on the WCB in this regard, but the rest of Alberta is very concerned, and I urge once again that this Bill not pass and everybody to vote against it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour to conclude debate on second reading.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate most of the comments that I've heard about the Bill. Some of them, as correctly identified by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, really have to do with clauses, which we don't get into on the second reading. I appreciate them being raised anyway because I will try and address them.

One area, of course, that's been raised as a concern is the whole issue of the appeal and an officer being able to deem something to be frivolous. That in itself is appealable to the director. There are cases – and we have to admit this. I think we're living in a day of such political sensitivity about political correctness that we would never, ever even want to be caught suggesting that an employer or an employee could be involved in a complaint that is frivolous or vexatious, but in fact this is the real world and it does happen. In some cases the costs of that can be considerable. So an officer would have the ability – and these would be in very extreme cases with a proven history – of deeming something to be frivolous. But the person, be it employee or employer, who has that deemed upon them still has a route of appeal to the director. It would not involve and does not involve the person having to bring, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo suggested, photographs and affidavits and everything else. Though, who knows, that may transpire depending on the individual case. So this is appealable to the director, as most similar situations are.

I'm just checking the notes here. I'll get information, again raised by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, in terms of the symposium results and recommendations. If those are pertinent to the discussion in committee, we'll make those available, if that will assist you.

The percentage of abusers, our estimation is – and this isn't rocket surgery, as a hockey commentator says – that in employers it would be less than 1 percent that would be deemed as consistently abusive or delinquent, and with employees we're just guessing, but you would have to say less than 1 percent. But it's that small percentage that can really drive up the system and in fact take up a lot of the time of the officers who are trying to deal with the majority of complaints that are valid, and that's the problem. The worker then loses out because of the time that's being deflected. So in terms of percentages that's rough. If the member, though, is interested in percentages, the number of complaints over the last year have been reduced about 25 percent from the previous year. The reason is because of the introduction of the self-help kits, where if a person has a complaint, they are given an easy to follow, step-by-step process where they in fact can initiate the process with their employer. That deals with complaints by the hundreds and keeps it a very simple process. Then obviously if the employer isn't responding, another mechanism kicks in. So there's been about a 25 percent reduction, and we're pleased to see that and pleased to see the success of those self-help kits.

4:00

I would also say that the regulations will deal with some of the concerns raised by all members who have spoken to this. At

committee stage we can look at what regulations would look like and how individual situations can be provided for and protected.

Family Day I don't see being involved in this particular discussion. That's something that I think there has to be another whole series of consultation on in terms of what the public would like to see with Family Day. As we know, it's in place for this year, but the discussion is going to be had in terms of the years ahead.

Is this the final revision? Well, we don't like to continually bring amendments to any Act, but where we feel that significant gain can be made for employees or for employers or for the workplace as a whole, then I think it's right. Unless members opposite bring forward something that really galvanizes our attention, I don't see every few months reopening this and coming out with more amendments. But, again, if it turns out that employees or employers are somehow being hurt in some way, then it's our duty as legislators to address it.

Independent body and not having enough investigators. One of the reasons we went with the whole approach of the self-help kits was to take away the simpler ones from the investigators so that their time can be more properly spent on the more complicated ones.

In terms of user pay for education – and I'll try not to refer directly to a clause here. In principle what we're talking about there is that just as a delinquent driver can be ordered to take a driver's education course and in fact pay for that course, so a delinquent employer could be ordered to take a course. It could be part of the order, part of the payment, to take a course in education in terms of work force relationships and in fact have to pay for that. So that's the primary reason for that. Also, if there was an education course that was particularly beneficial, it's consistent with our direction of user pay to make it at least permissible for charges to be allotted to that.

In terms of section 112 and the difference in wording from "province" to "jurisdiction," now we're moving to reciprocity agreements, or the ability for the department to make a reciprocity agreement, not just outside a province but possibly even outside of the country. If that was possible, that obviously gets us away from the word "province," because it may refer to a state. We're now into a North American free trade agreement. So it's just a reflection there that it may not just be restricted from one province to another.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked about workers facing the high fees of lawyers. High fees of lawyers are out of our hands, but they still remain in the hands of the lawyers, so they could probably adjust those downward, if they wanted to do that.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo also made a reference to sending someone to employment standards and then they come back and they're told that it's a number of weeks until their case can be heard. In fact, that's true. About 65 percent, however, of the difficult cases are dealt with, finished, and over with within about four months. So it's not an incredibly fast process. By the same token, it's faster than going through a court process, where lawyers could get in and ask for all kinds of appeals and things like that and delay the process.

There was a very specific reference made to a clause about waiving certain fees and no power to waive fees. I don't want to get ruled out of order referring again to a clause, but in fact there is provision for fees to be waived, and there is specific reference to that. In committee maybe the member would like to make some suggestions on how to make that a little clearer. I'd be open to that.

Bill 4. The Member for Fort McMurray talked about allowing it to make ways to deal with negotiations. Again, there's a bit of

blurring of the lines there because the public service unions are dealing under a separate Act than the employment standards Act. Though I appreciate his concern, it wouldn't really be addressed by this and similarly his reference of 20 or less employees. Though it affects large companies, it's really geared for the small individual person, employee, or employer. I'd have to hear from him more clearly on what he means exactly in terms of those references to small businesses with less than 20 employees.

The Member for Edmonton-Norwood – no. Where are you from? Sorry. I can't talk to him directly. Yeah, I was right. It is Edmonton-Norwood. I was right. Thank you. I'll send the spelling over to him.

A reference to filing fees . . .

Point of Order Inaudible Comments

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. member is rising on a point of order.

MR. BENIUK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-three whatever.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation.

MR. BENIUK: Citation (h), (i), (j). I would like the minister to please repeat for your benefit and for mine what he mumbled under his breath.

Thank you. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair can only deal with matters actually said and understood. The Chair can't deal with things that might have been said in an inaudible or slurred way, and therefore the Chair regretfully says that it cannot accept that as a point of order.

MR. DAY: I've been accused of a number of things, Mr. Speaker, and even guilty of many things. Slurred speech isn't one I usually run into, but I'm willing to check out the water glass and correct any . . . I suppose the next thing, in terms of wondering what's said under my breath, is the thought police will be coming in to see what I was thinking.

Debate Continued

MR. DAY: I'd like to say, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Edmonton-Norwood did raise a valid concern about filing of fees and how that's done and appealing that and what discretion is there to the umpire. That's actually a good question, a good concern. That can be addressed by regulation, and that's why I'm looking forward to the committee stage suggestions on the regulations, so we can protect against that very point. It was a good point that he raised.

The same with collection agencies. I would suggest that "reasonable" could be defined possibly in the regulations so that we can also deal with that concern. So I would look to the Member for Edmonton-Norwood and other members for suggestions when we're talking about regulations. I don't see that as being a huge concern, a collection agency charging a hugely exorbitant fee for collection, but it's a possibility, and if it is, then maybe there's a way we can correct it. I'll look for some suggestions from him on that.

4:10

On that, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the items that have been brought forward, and I look forward to getting into more detail at the committee stage and to hearing the suggestions.

I would move second reading of Bill 4.

Speaker's Ruling Clarification

MR. SPEAKER: Just before calling the vote, the Chair I think should say something with respect to the point raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood about this Bill being a money Bill or not a money Bill. The Chair does not believe it to be a money Bill. The definition of a money Bill is a Bill whose main object is "the creation of a public charge whether by way of taxation or expenditure." This Bill really provides for the imposition of user fees, whereby people who wish to access the services of the department can be asked to pay for the services provided, and therefore is not at all an effort to raise money. It's an effort to have the public who use the facilities defray the expenses.

On that basis, at this time the Chair rules that this is not a money Bill requiring royal recommendation. The Chair would also say, though, that this is only one stage of the consideration of this Bill, and before the final passage of same the Chair will have something more definitive to say.

Therefore, on that basis, all those in favour of second reading of Bill 4, Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, 1994, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:12 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Forsyth	Oberg
Amery	Friedel	Pham
Black	Gordon	Renner
Burgener	Haley	Rostad
Calahasen	Herard	Severtson
Cardinal	Hierath	Smith
Clegg	Hlady	Sohal
Coutts	Kowalski	Stelmach
Day	Laing	Tannas
Dinning	Lund	Taylor, L.
Doerksen	Mar	Thurber
Dunford	McClellan	West
Evans	McFarland	Woloshyn
Fischer	Mirosh	

Against the motion:

Abdurahman	Hanson	Taylor, N.
Beniuk	Langevin	White
Collingwood	Leibovici	Yankowsky
Decore	Sapers	Zariwny
Dickson	Sekulic	Zwozdesky
Germain	Soetaert	

Totals: For – 41 Against – 17

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 2 Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This legislation is legislation that is consistent with the government's overall objectives to concentrate on services and reduce the cost of delivering services. This will do so by amalgamation of the Alberta Sport Council and the Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, if members are interested in reading this legislation, I invite them to do so and compare it with the former pieces of legislation respecting those two organizations. What you'll find is that the objects and the powers that are laid out in sections 2, 3, and 4 of Bill 2 encompass and embody the powers and objects that were found under the previous legislation.

I move second reading of this Bill.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak about this Bill and to hopefully flag a few areas of concern which I know the hon. minister, being a man of good heart, will take straight to that point and consider as we move further in this debate on the proposed amalgamation of the parks and rec area with the Sport Council.

I have had the good pleasure over the past several years to work with many people involved in both these areas, but I think I'll start by talking, first of all, about the concept of the foundations as they were set up and what their initial purpose was. Back in the late '70s, Mr. Speaker, when the bulk of these foundations came into being, they really came into being for the specific purpose of having an ability to fund projects relevant to their areas, in this case recreation, parks and wildlife and/or sports, which government taxpayer dollars otherwise weren't able to support. They were brought in by a very caring group of individuals who were the government of that day, I think, with the intention also that certain voids be filled through the kinds of programs, grants, and/or purchases of material, library items, and so on that would support groups who were working through primarily a volunteer spirit of community throughout Alberta. The expressed intentions were also to handle slightly larger grants than would normally be the case and acceptable to Albertans from the taxpayers' purse. That is what the purpose of these foundations was all about. That is what the purpose of these foundations was all about. I think from what I have seen and from what I have read over the 14 or 15 years of this active lotteries type funding, the RPW Foundation as well as the Sport Council also had other purposes in mind.

Now, I think the business of having lottery dollars fund these kinds of projects is theoretically very good. However, there is a proviso, Mr. Speaker, that we have to add to that, and that is that in order for a foundation such as RPW or the Sport Council to fully accomplish its purpose, it truly has to have the authority that it's been given along with the responsibility being placed on it. There is tremendous responsibility here to accurately and honestly and openly reflect the objectives of the foundations through an autonomous and what we call arm's-length type of process. That is exactly what we need to do when we look at the process of selection of board members to these foundations.

A couple of things have to happen, Mr. Speaker. The first thing that has to happen is that we must have people appointed to these boards who, first of all, have expertise. I know the hon. minister will be looking at this as he starts to review the many suggestions

for appointments that have come into his view since he first called for them back in December, January. When we're talking about expertise, we must always look at merit, and we must never look at patronage. That is not to suggest that the current minister is so doing. It is only to caution him, as I would caution anybody on either side when they're reviewing appointments to these very important boards, that we maintain the integrity of the process and we maintain the integrity throughout with our consideration of people from across Alberta who represent the broad spectrum of individuals, who represent it from the point of view of gender, who represent it from the point of view of age, and especially from the point of view of geography. We have to have that. I think that as we move toward this type of a collapsing together of a couple of foundations, we must not lose sight of that particular process.

4:30

We have to be reminded, Mr. Speaker, of what happened when the former Premier Lougheed was around. We had one particular group that was looking for some representation, or at least a voice of representation, through the minister of culture at that time. During Mr. Lougheed's time I recall him setting up, I think at the suggestion of the hon. Horst Schmid, who was minister at that time, an advisory council to the minister of culture. It was called the Alberta Cultural Heritage Council. It represented individuals from many different ethnic backgrounds in 1971.

At the time when the Premier called for a chairman to be appointed to that council, a number of individuals, very capable individuals, were in fact proposed, but I recall distinctly the Premier of the day making a decision based on merit, somebody who could get the job done, not based on patronage. I don't think it would surprise you, Mr. Speaker, to know that Premier Lougheed appointed as the first chairman of the Alberta Cultural Heritage Council the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Laurence Decore. Now, that was a bold move for a Premier to make back then. They did a tremendous job that went on for about 18 years, not that he was chairman that long, but that was a symbolic kind of a thing. It was at a time when government wasn't afraid of its own shadow quite so much, and I don't deliver that as a shot against anybody. I simply state it as a fact and perhaps as something that can be formed as a bit of a model for us to follow.

There are good ideas on that side of the House sometimes, and there are good ideas on this side of the House as well. More than that, Mr. Speaker, there are good people throughout the province. The job of these kinds of councils to remain semiautonomous, to remain arm's length becomes much clearer, and I think the job gets done better when we pay attention to merit, merit, merit as opposed to patronage, patronage, patronage.

Now, the issue here is that by collapsing two foundations who have been working I think quite effectively in the community, notwithstanding a comment or two that the AG's department may have made from time to time, and building the kind of structural, infrastructural programming that allows more participation by more people – let's deal with the Sport Council, for example – that eventually leads to the kinds of things that the hon. minister spoke about in his private member's statement today and which our hon. leader, Mr. Decore, supported, and that's the Grande Prairie games. What we're looking at here is something that has come about as a result of fairly calculated, fairly good infrastructure programming, supported in this case by the lottery dollars when they were available. So as we look at the possible collapsing together, I don't want to see the focus of that kind of thing lost.

Now, I think there are examples, Mr. Speaker, where a smaller group of people sometimes can get a job done faster, not necessar-

ily better. Here we have two relatively separate entities that we're looking at bringing together rather suddenly under the chairmanship, I believe, of somebody who does have a bit of a partisan slant to him. I do think that the chairman that's being intended for this has a great deal of experience in the area and will probably do the job to the best of his abilities, but it doesn't look right, it doesn't feel right, and I'm not sure it's going to turn out right, Mr. Minister. So I would just flag that as small cautionary point.

The other part that I would be very careful about, having reviewed the membership on such a Bill . . .

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, rising on a point of order.

DR. WEST: Would the member entertain a question in debate? It's under *Beauchesne* 482.

MR. SPEAKER: The member has the option of accepting or rejecting the request.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'm very receptive on this side, and I listen. I would welcome the minister's question, certainly.

DR. WEST: Relevant to the debate in which you were referring to the leadership of the chairman that is proposed for the joint RPW Foundation/Sport Council, you said that you questioned his ability to run this organization. Would you say, then, that an individual that runs a multimillion dollar corporation in this province, that has effectively delivered a restructuring of that company, namely Amoco, isn't capable of chairing the RPW and Sport Council?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: No, I don't think that's what I said. We'll have to check the Blues.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not at all, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, in answer to that. That is not what I said, and if it's being interpreted that way, then that's not what was intended. What I'm simply saying is that there is a view of partisanship, there's an element of partisanship here given Mr. Moore's association with Mr. Klein's election campaign, and that should be . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'm sorry. I'm answering the question, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, then refer to the person as the Premier and not Mr. So and So, as you did with your own leader. That is not proper in this Assembly.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I apologize. I stand corrected on that breach.

Debate Continued

MR. ZWOZDESKY: The chairman who's intended does have some of those election connections, and that's not to slight that. I'm just stating a fact, and I would caution that we don't fall into those kinds of little things that make this process look even worse

than it already does out there. We're trying to help fix this up a little bit. Why don't we take a look at some of this review process, Mr. Speaker, taking place in a fashion that would allow some input from not only the government of the day but also the opposition? There's a tremendous slight to many, many capable individuals who I think would stand a good chance of coming in and helping out in the carrying out of these objectives. So I hope that that's corrected. At least the impression should be corrected.

Now, I want to speak a little bit also here about the bringing together or the pooling of the resources. Up until now we have had I think a significant amount of dollars that have been set aside specifically for RPW type activities and another pool of moneys that have been set aside specifically for funds over here in the Sport Council. As one of the questions during this part of the debate, if I could just leave it with the hon. minister, Mr. Speaker, I want to know whether or not there is some provision to in fact protect and/or isolate the funds that would otherwise have been available without the collapsing together of the two foundations so that the many, many valuable grant programs, the many valuable acquisitions programs, and the many valuable programs that, for example, the RPW Foundation does in the schools don't somehow suffer as a result of this collapsing together. What happens when you merge two factions is that sometimes one or the other tends to dominate a little over the other. That's sometimes what you see happening in this House, and sometimes it's not that beneficial to the purpose. So we want to be sure that there's some protection for that separation of these moneys. By the same token, we have to make sure that the funds being set aside over in the Alberta Sport Council area also enjoy some protection and isolation as they go into this large pool.

Then there's the business of the tremendous amount of revenue that gets raised through interest on those lottery dollars. Will there be a consistent and even and equal type of sharing of those dollars as well? I say this in response to a few meetings that we've had with people who know that this possible collapsing is coming.

I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that it is the minister's intention with this Bill to try to in fact save the government some money. I think that's quite a laudable effort. I want to make sure, as I read through the Bill, that we don't lose sight of the fact that while we could be saving some money by collapsing the size of the board, we don't suddenly take too much advantage of what they call the contract positions that might go along with that, because there is a provision in that Bill for additional contractors to be hired. There's nothing wrong with that. There is expertise through that. But the fact is that as you look at that as a potential vehicle for more employment on the one hand, I think there's some sense of false economy on the other, if you get my point. I'm trying to say: don't try and make it look like you're saving money here and then let some other things take place over here that would counteract or counterbalance that. I'm sure that the minister has that first and foremost in his mind as part of his strategy.

4:40

The other parts of the proposed amalgamation which deal with the bringing together of the two boards relevant to office space, equipment, secretarial services, and that kind of thing I think can to some extent be understood a little more clearly. But as we review these specific recommendations of the minister relevant to the objectives of these two foundations, I hope that as we move through, we will have some further opportunity for debate on protecting not only the objectives but also the funding, as well as the integrity of the process. I think it's time for government to make the kinds of moves that gain favour with the public, not always and only at the balance or attempt to balance something based on a bottom line.

There is much more to running this province, as they are all finding out and so are we, than just the financial measuring stick. We must keep in mind things like the human condition that results, things like the infrastructures that have been built which support athletes, some of whom are now over representing us in Lillehammer and doing extremely well. I'll be the first to support the government when they come forward with more of those kinds of initiatives, and/or I'll be the first to stand up and support something if and when they can guarantee me that we'll see the protection and the further conveyance of that same style of caring that has traditionally characterized some of these kinds of moves in the past.

Now I'm going back to the late '70s and early '80s. Without those valuable infrastructure programs such as are available through RPW and the Sport Council, we cannot expect these young people to have any of the opportunities. Some of the opportunities we've talked about in this House are possibly being denied in the schools. We'll wait and see what happens there. We don't want the same thing to start to run rampant through everything else. We are talking about lottery dollars here. We do know that cuts have to be made. Nobody is saying that cuts don't have to be made. They simply are being asked where to make the cuts, how to make the cuts, what's the best employment of the dollars. Be they taxpayer dollars, Mr. Speaker, be they lottery dollars, the point is that money is money, and there's a high consciousness about that. So we're not arguing that fact, and I don't want to be sidetracked by anybody on that point.

We're talking here about a legacy that has been built. I had the pleasure of speaking and meeting with a board member and with the executive director of the Sport Council while I was in Calgary on one of our tours. I know, Mr. Speaker, that the executive director came up through these programs in Alberta and was a famous boxer. I know that he speaks and works from the heart, and I'm sure that he will continue to do this, no matter where in the process he might land. But I think we do have to be very prudent and very cautious in how we provide the guidance and what the parameters are for that guidance. I would hope that we wouldn't see the demise of that particular part of the process.

I want to just conclude here quickly with a bit of a cautionary note, again, that this process not be done too quickly, that this process be given good and fair time. I think there are many groups to hear from. I don't know how many groups the minister has consulted with. I think they want to make sure that we have in fact touched base with all the people. So as long as the process isn't rushed, Mr. Minister, and we're given a little more information.

I've been asking for information, as the Minister of Municipal Affairs knows, relevant to Access, and not because I'm trying to pepper him or damage him. I'm trying to find out information that hundreds and hundreds of letter writers and hundreds and hundreds of faxed letters are suggesting, as well as thousands of phone calls . . .

Point of Order Relevance

DR. WEST: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, rising on a point of order.

DR. WEST: Yes. I would like to know relevancy. It seems the debate goes off and on. We're studying a Bill right now, and we get into Access Network and all types of things. Could I have a determination of relevancy?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'm always pleased to respond to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I'm simply pointing out that, for example, as I asked for information relevant to Bill 2, similarly I was asking for information relevant to the recommendations that the current Minister of Municipal Affairs is studying relevant to Access, which is also my area. I'm just comparing the process here so that we don't fall into that trap of information not being shared, such as the Dennis Anderson report. I just want to see the thing. Similarly here, if there is information relevant to this Bill, I'd like to see that too, what's behind it.

Debate Continued

MR. ZWOZDESKY: So until we have a little more information on it, Mr. Speaker, I would humbly suggest, if it's possible, that we move adjournment on this debate until we do get that information.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore has moved that debate be now adjourned on Bill 2. All those in favour of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. The debate is accordingly adjourned.

head: Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Moved by Mr. Friedel:

That an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To His Honour the Honourable Gordon Towers, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

Moved by Mr. Decore that the motion be amended by the addition of the following words: Since the Klein government has embarked on an education restructuring program without the input or approval of Albertans, it is our duty to respectfully submit to Your Honour that Your Honour's present government does not have the confidence of this House.

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mr. Friedel]

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River, if he wishes. The hon. member is not required to take the floor. Other members?

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I should preface my comments by saying that I had been looking forward with great anticipation to being able to join this debate, but after last evening and after hearing the Member for Calgary-Egmont, my enthusiasm waned a little bit. The reason was not so much anything he said in his text, but it was the way he started out. You recall he went on to talk about the tremendous support he'd received on June 15, but what particularly hurt was when he observed, and I quote, "Regrettably, only 58.1 percent of these electors voted." Well, as the MLA from the constituency which has the singular honour of having the lowest voter turnout, I always hate to be reminded of voter turnouts. So that put me in

a different frame of mind, after the Member for Calgary-Egmont made that observation, but I've been able to renew my enthusiasm.

My focus in coming at the Speech from the Throne – I suppose one could look at it in a partisan sense. One can look at it from the sense of how we might think Albertans view it, or we can come at it from a perspective of what we hear from our constituents. I've had a particular opportunity, sir; in fact, it was just Tuesday evening that I had the chance to meet with 140 constituents in Calgary-*Buffalo*. What these people wanted to discuss was the impact of budget cuts and program cuts in that area that is encompassed in my provincial constituency. I thought what I'd do, so that my comments later hopefully make a little more sense and to give them a particular kind of context, is just take a moment and outline to members some of the characteristics that make Calgary-*Buffalo* somewhat different and unique.

The first thing is that there are well in excess of 2,000 recent immigrants in Calgary-*Buffalo*, I expect a larger concentration than almost any other constituency. We have more than 10,000 people that reside in Calgary-*Buffalo* who have an annual income of less than \$18,000 per year, more than 1,600 unemployed Albertans. Now, that was statistics that go back a year, but I'm pessimistic that the number has decreased. One year ago in Calgary-*Buffalo* there were 1,400 Albertans who could speak neither English nor French, 1,400. There were almost 1,500 seniors, half of the seniors in Calgary-*Buffalo*, who were on the guaranteed income program. Before the September welfare changes, there were approximately 7,500 constituents of mine who were on social assistance programs, one program or another.

So when I respond to the Speech from the Throne, what's important to me is to try and decipher what the Alberta advantage means to my electors, to my constituents, to try and find some way of reconciling the rhetoric in the Speech from the Throne with the kind of impact that program cuts and budget cuts are having on the people who look to me as a representative and as a voice in this Assembly.

4:50

When I look at the Speech from the Throne, to avoid rambling all over, I thought I'd try and come up with some criteria I'd use to measure the Speech from the Throne. After some reflection I identified three. The first one is that I think Albertans, I think Calgary-*Buffalo* constituents are entitled to look and see to what extent there are new ideas, to what extent there's creativity in the throne speech.

The second thing I thought was important is a sense of realism. Does the speech reflect the social, the economic, the political reality in the province? Does it reflect the mood of the times?

The third criterion I thought would be useful in measuring the throne speech was the credibility of the government. It's fine to hear what the government proposes to do, but how can we assess? What do we look at in assessing and measuring the likelihood that all of the fancy rhetoric we see in the throne speech will ever be implemented and the aims that are set out are ever going to be achieved?

So applying those three criteria – just bear with me. The Minister of Municipal Affairs always seems to get so excited when we get in one of these discussions. I can only invite him to stand up after me and be able to respond in a way that all members can hear, because he always has something interesting to say, is always one of the more provocative members. I'd be disappointed if he doesn't join in in addressing the amendment sponsored by the Leader of the Opposition.

When you look at the business of new ideas and what kind of creativity we see in the Speech from the Throne, we see some

interesting things like Global Business Plan, an Asia Pacific business strategy, a Mexico trade and tourism strategy, a hot lead investor program, but as is too often the case, precious few words of description.

Then keep in mind that this is the very same government that sent former ministers Oldring and Anderson off to do this assessment of our trade offices around the world. They came back. We didn't get any kind of a formal report. We didn't get any sort of a comprehensive written evaluation. One might have thought, Mr. Speaker, that with a government that comes up with all of these terrific buzz phrases, a government that's able to generate – and they do write a good throne speech – all of these terrific sounding initiatives in terms of trade and increasing employment opportunities here, we would have seen that same kind of creativity when it came to assessing the trade offices we already have. That gives me a problem.

I guess the other thing I look at: when we look at the record of this government, we hear so much about the three-year business plans. I can't tell you, Mr. Speaker, how many meetings I've been at where a Conservative member has been present, and there's always the reference to the three-year business plan. Well, I think what all Albertans expect from a business plan, certainly what every businessman expects from a business plan, is not just an outline of what kinds of dollars you're going to save but a measurement of outputs at the end of the three-year cycle. The thing that I've never heard addressed, not by the Minister of Energy, not by the Minister of Environmental Protection, nobody ever tells us at the end of three years with one of these plans – if it's education, has the Minister of Education told us that we're going to have more or fewer children with library cards? Has the minister responsible for seniors told us that we're going to have more or fewer seniors able to live independently in their own accommodation? Those are outputs. That's what I think not only I but Albertans want to hear.

All I've ever heard from members of this government is: we're going to cut costs; we're going to save money. All thinking Albertans recognize – and we certainly see it every time we look at the New Zealand experience – that if you simply look at cutting dollars and you don't follow the impact through on the people that we're supposed to be representing, protecting, and advancing their interests – this is no business plan. What happens is that the dollar savings are too often illusory. You think that we move these people off social services – and we can certainly stand up and announce in the loudest possible voice that we've taken these thousands of people off – but the reality is that you don't have to look very far to realize that all we've done is we've dumped these people.

We've dumped them at the office of student finance, and we run into a whole different set of problems. If we had a measurement of outputs, what we'd find is something like the constituent that came to my attention just the other day. This is a single parent in my constituency with four children. The youngest child is less than six months old. What happened is that her supports for independence income was suddenly terminated, and she was referred to student finance. She was told: we don't provide funding any more through the supports for independence; you now go to student finance. Well, she went to student finance. Unfortunately, they're backlogged. While she's waiting for them to process her application, Mr. Speaker, her phone is cut off, her utilities are cut off, and she's served an eviction notice. Fortunately, when my constituency office brought this to the attention of student finance, they were able to expedite the application. They were able to expedite the process.

What this shows us, Mr. Speaker, is that the business plan is so focused on dollars and cents that they've lost perspective and they've lost sight of what's even more important and ought to be more important to every one of us, no matter what side of the House we're on. That's whether individual Albertans and Alberta families are going to be advantaged or disadvantaged at the end of the three years. It's cold comfort to tell Albertans that at the end of this three-year plan . . .

Point of Order Questioning a Member

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development is rising on a point of order.

MR. ADY: Would the hon. member entertain a question?

MR. DICKSON: No. If I had another five minutes to my 20, I'd be delighted to entertain questions, but I've got short time and we've got lots of ground to cover. [interjections] Well, we're going to have lots of questions to raise, Mr. Speaker, in the course of that three and a half years. We hope the government has half the responses to the questions they're going to get.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: In any event, when I look for new ideas and creativity, I simply don't see it in the throne speech, so it doesn't get us very far in that respect. I do see some positive initiatives, and I have to acknowledge that the program to look at duplication of services between federal and provincial governments is an extremely positive initiative. I applaud the government for being involved and supporting that process. Some of the energy announcements sound promising. But then I have to say that only in Alberta, only in this province, could the government trot out once again the prospect of freedom of information legislation and attempt to pass it off as something new and innovative.

You know, the freedom of information panel finished its work in the fall. We worked very hard to be able to finish a report by, I think, the second week in December. I see my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek nodding, because she remembers clearly when we finished that report. The Minister of Justice had a lawyer from his department working with our committee throughout the entire process, so we've had from at least the second week in December to this point to redraft this Bill. It's not that we're carving any new ground, Mr. Speaker. What the committee recommended – we took some of the strengths we found in other jurisdictions, and we put those things together. It's not a huge drafting problem, so I guess one of my concerns is: why are we still getting promises? How far are we into this legislative session? A number of days. We still haven't seen the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the freedom of information, I would say that if the government adopts the recommendations from the panel report, I'm going to be the first one to jump up and rush over and congratulate every member of the cabinet. But I have concerns and I get nervous when I see the Bill not in front of us, when I don't see what should be the flagship Bill of a government that really wants to show people that they're listening, that they're open and they're accountable. There would have been no better way to do it than to make that Bill 1. It's not here, and that makes me ask questions. Where is it? Why isn't it here?

5:00

Mr. Speaker, I said that another one of the tests we have to use is to look at the quality of realism. In terms of realism when the

government says that it's listening to Albertans, does that jibe with what we experience, with the kind of feedback we're getting from our constituents, with what we pick up from the media?

Well, let's take education, because I think that's a good example. The government tells us they're consultative. The government tells us they listen. What did they do in education? They had roundtables in Edmonton and Calgary. Were they open public meetings to parents and educators? Of course they weren't, Mr. Speaker. It was a handpicked group of I think less than 300 people in two centres.

You know, there was massive involvement and public involvement in education, but it wasn't at the roundtables organized by the Minister of Education. They were the alternate roundtables organized by opposition politicians, organized by the Alberta Teachers' Association, meetings organized by parent advisory councils, by school groups, people who have an enormous stake in education and recognize how important that issue is in terms of the future of this province.

Listening and consulting: it should start in this Chamber. You know, the Premier is often quoted as saying that he's anxious to get out from under the dome, but I sometimes wonder when he goes out from under the dome who he's really talking to. Well, it seems to me that it's his office that identifies which groups he's going to meet with, which Albertans he's going to talk to. I think he has to be reminded and I think the government has to be reminded that there are 83 MLAs in this Chamber. We all have constituents, we all get input, and we all get feedback. If the Premier wants to find out what Albertans think, I'm going to encourage him and his government to listen a little harder, to listen a little more carefully, to listen a little more attentively to what goes on in this Chamber, because there are plenty of good ideas. The government doesn't like them all, but I'll tell you, the input and the reflected views you're going to get in this Chamber are probably far more reflective of what's going on in the larger province than the handpicked, selected groups the Premier meets with in private when he goes off on his tours.

Point of Order Improper Inferences

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader rising on a point of order.

MR. EVANS: I've tried to be charitable in listening to the member opposite referring to the Premier and referring to who the Premier speaks to when he's out of this Chamber. I refer to Standing Orders 23(i) and (j) and I think giving a liberal interpretation to those two subsections of Standing Order 23. Quite clearly, the hon. member opposite has come to the conclusion and is making the statement that our Premier is selective about who he meets when he travels this great province. That is utter and unadulterated nonsense, Mr. Speaker. Anyone who has followed the Premier, anyone who is aware of his schedule knows that he deals with those in every social economic group throughout this province. He meets with people on their turf, north, south, east, and west of this province. I would ask the hon. member to reconsider his remarks and withdraw them.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I hadn't anticipated that the hon. Minister of Environmental Protection was going to make a speech in terms of rising on a purported point of order. I certainly have no intention of suggesting that the Premier has been doing his touring

at the expense of standing in the Chamber when the Legislature is sitting.

The second point of the minister's objection is not a point of order at all but suggests in terms of the quality of consultation the Premier undertakes when he is out of the office. But I'm not suggesting, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly regret if anybody took an inference that I was suggesting that the Premier was not attending to business in the Chamber when the Chamber's in session. That was not my intention, and if that inference was drawn, that wasn't the inference intended.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair did not hear the hon. Deputy Government House Leader make that statement. The Chair heard the Deputy Government House Leader complain about the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo saying that there was a very select group of people that the Premier was meeting and not meeting with the general public and therefore was casting aspersions against the Premier in that area.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the minister who raises the issue, the point I was attempting to make was that the most effective way of getting the views of Albertans is in this Chamber, not out meeting with particular groups. That's the point I was making, and I can't resile from that point because I think it's accurate.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, the Chair does have to say, hon. member, that it does not really feel that there is a point of order because there was really no charge or allegation on your part. You were doing some speculating, though, that maybe could have an adverse effect. Bearing in mind that part of the Standing Order, the member is free to continue.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Speaker. I just assumed that when the minister rose with such haste and such passion it was a specific Standing Order he felt I had violated rather than another nerve that had been touched.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, moving on, then, from this question of realism, one other point I'd make, leaving aside the Travel Alberta circuit – I think we have this other business. On page 7 of the Speech from the Throne we see the government stressing the importance of seeking the ideas of employees. Well, I think that's a laudable objective. It is an important purpose. But it seems to me that if this government was so concerned with seeking the ideas of employees, we wouldn't see this government being punitive with those employees that have the courage to speak out when they see that government programs are compromising, jeopardizing the interests of children, compromising the interests of Albertans.

I think that if this government was genuinely concerned about ensuring that they listened to employees, there are two things they could do immediately. The first one would be to ensure that every single government department has a system in place so that employees are listened to by the minister and deputy minister and assistant deputy minister, and secondly, to ensure that there's a reasonable whistle-blower protection legislation so that employees that see serious government wrongdoing – whether it's a waste of public money, your money and my money, or whether there's a grave environmental hazard or some kind of a public health issue – have a vehicle to be able to raise that and raise it outside of their department. They could do it through the Ombudsman. That's legislation we need in Alberta. It's a perfect companion to

a strong freedom of information Bill. We don't see it. If the government were genuine in saying that they wanted to listen, that ought to be in the Speech from the Throne, and it's not.

In terms of credibility, Mr. Speaker, my favourite part is on page 1. I see the reference, "All of us must make some sacrifices." Well, implicit in that surely is that all Albertans are sort of shoulder to shoulder and we're all getting affected roughly the same way. Isn't that the message in the throne speech? Well, I can tell you that if I hadn't realized it before, after meeting with 140 constituents on Tuesday evening, those people don't feel that they're shoulder to shoulder with every other Albertan. They don't feel that they're being affected equally with other Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to join the debate to speak against the amendment to the Speech from the Throne. For the past few days I have been sitting back and listening to speaker after speaker from the other side. I realize that it is a very important amendment. It is asking for a vote of nonconfidence in the government, and I've been trying very hard to find the reason why they ask for such a serious amendment. I look across to the other side, and I only see at most nine members sitting in their chairs asking us the government to bring down the government by ourselves. It needs the support from us to do that. That is a very, very serious thing to ask us to do. I cannot see anything that is more irresponsible than that. We only have elements in our mandate to carry out what we have promised the people of this province that we are going to do. In this House whenever we raise a question of trust and of confidence in the government, we have to put our conviction against that kind of amendment. We cannot just waste taxpayers' money by bringing up a serious amendment and not even bothering to be here to show our commitment to that kind of amendment.

5:10

Now, I would like to go back to the Speech from the Throne, because I think it deserves our attention more. We as the government for the first time in history are committed to real change. We have set out to create a long-term vision for this province. We created a three-year business plan for every department across the board, and that, Mr. Speaker, I think is real long-term vision. In the past government has always tried to do business from one year to the next. No government in the history of Canada has even bothered to set out a vision as to where we are going to be three years from now.

Also in the Speech from the Throne we point out clearly that the goal we are trying to achieve three years from now is a balanced budget. That will lead to a debt-free society for our children, and that is very, very important. That is the strongest commitment that this government can make, not only to the people of Alberta today but also for the future generations.

Also for the last few days we have heard a lot about jobs and job creation. People have put forward a question: where are the 110,000 jobs that the government promised? This government is trying to create the climate for job creation. We are not in the business of creating 110,000 jobs. I cannot understand why the Premier has repeatedly explained that again and again and again and it doesn't seem to get through. What we are trying to do are three things: number one, balance the budget; number two, keep the taxes low; and number three, create an environment where government doesn't interfere with business. All of these three things will stimulate the economy, and it will create jobs by itself.

No government should be in the business of creating jobs. That has never worked, and it will never, never work.

Another important point from the Speech from the Throne is that we are going to improve and streamline government, and indeed that is what this government is committed to. Personally, I myself and every MLA in this House have accepted almost a 30 percent pay cut since the day I put my name up for nomination. The government has gone through a series of reductions, and we are asking many departments to cut expenditures by up to 30 percent at the same time trying to protect the quality of the service that we provide to the people of Alberta.

Also, we take into account the input and the ideas of the citizens across this province. They tell us that we should emphasize the importance of education, health care, and social services, and that is what we did. Education only has a 12.4 percent cut compared to many other departments that took up to a 30 percent cut. I keep hearing the gloom and doom from the other side saying that our education is going to be ruined, that our children will not get the education they deserve. But I remember also during the election that the Leader of the Opposition promised that they were going to cut \$1.1 billion in the first year alone. Sometimes I wonder where that \$1.1 billion would come from if they didn't touch education and if they didn't touch health care and if they didn't touch social services.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray is rising on a point of order.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, sir. Pursuant to 482 of *Beauchesne*, I wonder if the member will answer a question.

MR. PHAM: No, simply because we don't have a lot of time. Otherwise, I would love to answer his question.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray rising on another point of order.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you. In light of the member's fear that he doesn't have enough time, will he answer a question if he does not take his full 20 minutes in this debate?

MR. PHAM: I certainly will.

Debate Continued

MR. PHAM: We are talking about a commitment from this government to listen to the people of Alberta, listen to Albertans. That's what we have been trying to do. We have held roundtable discussions. All MLAs have run town hall meetings, and people across this province have told us repeatedly: yes, we want to have a balanced budget; yes, we want to reduce government spending. There is no way that we can balance our budget without cutting government spending. I cannot understand how the Liberal members think in their heads that we can achieve a balanced budget without touching anything. The minute we start cutting in any area, they jump up and down and think that the world is going to end tomorrow.

I remember a few months ago when we had changes in social services. Everyday I come to this House, and I hear questions from the other side saying that the poor and disadvantaged have been left out in the winter, that there was nothing they could do

on, and that there's no money for them, no means for them to survive. Mr. Speaker, I can speak from my own experience. I probably was one of the poorest persons in this province. The reason that I survived was not because of welfare, not because of handouts from the government but because of having the determination that, yes, I am responsible for my own success or my own failure. I strongly believe that the people of this province believe nothing less than that.

It is insult to many of the children and many of the parents out there that someone can suggest we should go on and keep spending the way we are today and leave them with a better future for tomorrow. That will never work. Someone can just take out a calculator and calculate how much debt we are in today and what will happen 10 years from now if we don't balance our budget. There is no way that we can leave our children with a huge debt for tomorrow and say: yes, we are doing the right thing. People keep talking about the future of our children, and I think it is for the future of our children that we are in this House today trying to make some difficult decisions, trying to balance the budget, and trying to protect the essential services that we are delivering to the people of this province. They deserve nothing less. If anyone tells me that we should stop and we should not do the things that we are going to do today, I think that's totally irresponsible.

Further to that, to bring this type of amendment to this House only eight months after this government received a very strong mandate from across this province, to go back on the changes we promised we were going to do is ridiculous at least. You know, we haven't done anything that we haven't told Albertans we're going to do. We say that we are going to balance the budget. We say that we are going to streamline government. We say that we are going to consult Albertans when we do those things. They are all the things that we are doing. They are all the things that we are going to do. Across this province people strongly believe in the direction the government is taking in terms of creating 110,000 jobs.

5:20

In the Speech from the Throne obviously the government has a long-term vision. It has seen the opportunity existing in Asia and in Mexico, and that is the future of Alberta. We are going to have to work better at taking the opportunity in those countries, because that is where the opportunity will be. We have to do a lot more export to those countries.

For the first time in the history of this province we clearly spell out in the three-year business plans a co-ordinated plan of action from all departments of the government, taking the responsible way of cutting expenditures while at the same time realizing the opportunity that we have out there.

The Premier of this province also on his trip to Asia last November tried to focus the attention of the private sector on a very new yet promising market for Albertans. I personally was very happy with his decision, because we have to realize that the Asian market, with more than one-third of the world population and with many of the booming economies today, will be a very, very big market for Alberta in the future. If we are not preparing ourselves for that kind of market, we are going to lose out to the other competitors.

Also in the Speech from the Throne we set out our legislative programs. We are committed to passing the access to information and protection of privacy Act. This is a very strong commitment from the government, because for the first time we have said that in Alberta all of the information the public would like to know and that the government can provide without interfering in the privacy

of other people will be allowed. Also, a committee formed of both government and opposition members has traveled across the province to listen to the people, listen to what they have to say about how they want to get access to the information that we have.

Also, we have moved to full provincial funding in education. That is a bold initiative from the Department of Education. That addressed the inequity problem that has been in existence for many years. No one has even tried to address that. For the first time this government realized that the children living in rural Alberta should have more chances and should have the same level of access to education as the children living in the cities.

The government also looked at trying to reduce the number of health boards, to bring the number of health boards in line with the spending level that this government is encouraging. This is a big step forward, because during the election we made a promise to the people of this province that, yes, we are going to reduce spending. We would like to attack the middle layer of management. We would like to reduce expenditures in that area and put the money back to the people who use the services of the system; i.e., the patients of the hospitals and the students of the education system. I cannot see any reason why the members from the opposite side do not agree and support us in this initiative.

In view of the time, I would like to move for the adjournment of the debate now.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose has moved that the debate be now adjourned in this matter. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn pursuant to Government Motion 4, passed in the Assembly on Tuesday, February 15, 1994.

[At 5:26 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]