

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 22, 1994 1:30 p.m.**

Date: 94/02/22

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition to the Legislative Assembly signed by 105 parents of the students at Monsignor Doyle school in my constituency. These were collected at a family dance on February 11. They're asking the government not to implement the educational system restructuring plan.

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

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 60 constituents of Calgary-East. These constituents are concerned about the restructuring of the education system. I must add that I'm not doing that to please the Liberals or side with them; I am doing that consistent with the open and responsive policy of this government. I have also forwarded a copy of this petition to the hon. Minister of Education.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, last week on February 14 I presented this Assembly with two petitions: one from the Hazeldean elementary school parents in Avonmore and another one signed by over a thousand individuals from the larger area of Edmonton-Avonmore requesting that this government do something in relation to the cuts to education. Could I request that those two petitions be read now?

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, feel that education is essential to the future of all Albertans, and petition the Assembly to urge the government to reconsider its proposed cuts to education.

As education is essential to the future of all Albertans we, the undersigned, wish to petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to reconsider its proposed cuts to education.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had introduced a petition on February 14 that also expressed the concern of a number of Calgarians with respect to the restructuring of the education system, and I ask now that that petition be read and received, sir.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta not to implement the

plan to restructure the educational system in Alberta, as proposed by the Minister of Education.

We also request the Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that every Albertan will have the opportunity for input and involvement in future plans to restructure the educational system in Alberta.

head: Notices of Motions

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 38(1)(a) I am giving notice that tomorrow I will be moving that written questions do stand and retain their places on the Order Paper and that motions for returns stand and retain their places except for Motion 165.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 52 of the Legislative Assembly Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly today the 1992-93 annual report of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave of you to table on behalf of the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan a document named Education: Foundation for the Future, restructuring proposal for our education system. This is on behalf of constituents, a nonpartisan document.

Thank you.

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

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table four copies of the 1992 annual report for the department of the environment.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of a document. It's a notice of a public rally to be held this Thursday at 4 o'clock on the Legislature steps. It's entitled: Save Our Students! Let's show Ralph Klein we do care. I understand the Premier will be invited to this one as well.

Thank you.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table 161 letters from residents all over Alberta who are opposed to the decision to transfer family and community services funding to Municipal Affairs.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very honoured and pleased to introduce 32 students from Muir Lake community school. That's a school that in the previous Legislature I shared with the hon. Deputy Premier. To give you an idea of the kind of parental support they have in that school, they are accompanied by seven parents: Mrs. Monroe, Mrs. McCormick, Mrs. Juleff, Mrs. Olson, Mrs. Franck, Mrs. Book, Mrs. Hilden, and their teacher Mrs. Debbie Rutland. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Wendy Williams, the 4-H Premier's award winner for 1993. Wendy lives in Gibbons and during her nine years of involvement in the Alberta 4-H program has received numerous awards at the club, district regional, and provincial levels. The Premier's award is Alberta's highest 4-H honour given annually to a 4-H member in recognition of outstanding achievement, communication and leadership skills, and contributions to the community. Wendy will serve as the ambassador for the 4-H program for a year. Today Wendy is accompanied by her parents, Joe and Cindy, her sister Virginia, her brothers Wayne and Gordie, her grandmothers Anne Allison and Helen Williams, and her aunt Deb Goldring. Wendy and her family are seated in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask them to stand and please receive the usual warm recognition of this House.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 13 visitors from Capilano Mall's 55-plus group. This is a very lively group of people. They participate regularly in activities and discussions, and they certainly keep in touch with current affairs and give me very good advice. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise so that the House may give them a warm welcome.

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

MR. BENIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 17 visitors from NAIT, which is located in my riding. They are members of the environmental law class, and they are seated in the members' gallery. They are accompanied by their instructor Dr. Forrest Tittle. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure and pride to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly four members of my constituency, four of seven people who have worked and volunteered their time to develop the paper that was tabled today. I'd ask Karen Sliwkanich, Tom Taylor, Alexander Doyle, and David Doyle to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and a privilege today for me to introduce to you and through you Dennis and Ida May McLarty. Dennis is a board member of improvement district 21, and he is here this week to attend the RIDAA convention. I ask those folks to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40 head: Oral Question Period
Child Welfare

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the minister responsible for social services were warned by the Children's Advocate and in fact warned by our caucus that more children would suffer as long as dollars were more important than protect-

ing children. One more child has died, this time a two and a half year old in Calgary. Had it not been for the persistence of a reporter, the child's death in September would have remained a secret. Mr. Premier, I'd like you to explain to Albertans why government officials did not remove the child from the child's home when it was discovered that the child had been scalded on his backside.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, just to speak a bit to the preamble, of course we have as our very, very best interests the welfare of children. Indeed, an investigation into this very tragic and unfortunate incident is under way, and I would ask the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services to elaborate.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a very unfortunate incident, and we'll do everything we can to prevent issues of this nature happening in the future. We will continue monitoring this process very closely, and hopefully we can put processes in place that will prevent incidents of this nature happening. As you're aware, just recently we appointed the commissioner to review the whole child welfare issue, and within 18 months we'll come out with a complete plan on how we may reshape the child welfare issue in the future.

I'd just like to tell Albertans that we are sincere when we're dealing with child welfare issues. We're very sincere when we're dealing with children's issues, Mr. Speaker. In fact, in the next three years of my budget child welfare will be close to \$500 million.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, an investigation isn't good enough. Diligence would have prevented this death.

I'd like the minister to tell us why government officials, why people from his department weren't checking up on the child after the four-month supervision period that the court ordered had finished. Why wasn't that being done?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, from the reports I received from my department, the staff did everything they could in order to deal with this. As you're aware, one of the biggest concerns this government had and people interested in how this government operated in relation to child welfare was the caseload that child welfare workers had. We've reduced the caseload by 27,500 cases in the past nine months. We haven't reduced any staff component in that area. So we've made sure that the staff out there can handle issues of this nature in the future.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, it's unbelievable that the minister would stand in this Assembly and tell Albertans that his department did everything, that his staff did everything they could. Explain, Mr. Minister, why when just four days before the child's death a day care worker phones your office in Calgary and tells and reports about severe bruising to the child something wasn't done then?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I do have to defend my staff. They do a good job, as best they can within their abilities. Once the investigation is completed and it's determined as to what happened in the incident, then I will be able to make a further comment on it.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, that's not good enough. Maybe the minister didn't hear my question. My question. Four days before

the child died your offices learned about it. Why didn't they move in? Why didn't they do something?

MR. CARDINAL: Again, Mr. Speaker, I have to defend my staff. They do whatever they can within their ability to deal with issues of this nature. Like I say, once the investigation is completed and it is determined as to what happened in the incident, then I will be able to respond to it further.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, this today is a cover-up, and I want to know why this is being covered up by the minister and his department. Why the cover-up on this matter, Mr. Minister?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, there is no cover-up in this particular incident. Like I indicated before, there is an investigation continuing on this. When that investigation is finalized and it is determined as to what happened, then I will make comments further on it.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, a little boy has his backside scalded. A little boy has severe bruising. A little boy has to get court supervision. Mr. Minister, what does it take in terms of abuse before you do move in and you do something?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, in this particular case for the third time I'll say to this House: when the investigation is completed and it is determined what happened, at that time I will make a comment on it.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to advise Albertans again that we do care as a government. We are spending in the next three years close to \$500 million on children's services alone. I think this government cares. It's unfortunate that incidents of this nature happen.

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

Family and Community Support Services

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems fitting that just before the Family Day weekend this government announced that they intended to kill one of the few programs that actually helps and supports families. Make no mistake, transferring the funds for family and community support services will mark the beginning of the end for this highly respected and needed program. My question is to the Premier. This is one of the few programs that actually works, Mr. Premier. Why are you letting this happen?

MR. KLEIN: The program, Mr. Speaker, will be as strong and as viable as ever. As a matter of fact, the municipalities will even have more choices relative to FCSS. The program will in no way jeopardize our contributions from the Canada assistance plan. It will give the municipalities a tremendous amount of flexibility, even more flexibility than they have right now to determine the needs in their own communities. The funds will flow in a much more expeditious manner. We will be able to cut down on our administrative costs, and everyone should be happy.

MS HANSON: What does the Premier intend to do if a community shuts down its shelters and stops delivering Meals on Wheels because it's spent all its money on pot holes?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I think any elected body who wants to do like most politicians want to do – and that's to get re-elected – will

certainly define those things that are important in one's community and make sure that those services and those community needs are delivered in an appropriate manner. Here's a caucus on one side . . . [interjections]

1:50

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is directed at the Minister of Family and Social Services. Why are you so silent, Mr. Minister? Just six months ago you sent a letter stating that FCSS is particularly effective because it works in partnership with communities and responds directly to community needs, and now that the entire program is threatened, you suddenly clam up.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, nothing has changed in how priorities have been set in the past with FCSS. The 200 municipalities out there that have agreements to deliver FCSS have always set priorities on programs; they've always set priorities on budgets. As a former municipal councillor it's an insult when someone says that municipalities are not capable of setting priorities. I have a press release here, February 9, 1994, by the Liberal opposition saying that municipalities and communities out there will use FCSS dollars for roads and sewers. That is an outright insult to the 300 municipalities out there.

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

Education Restructuring

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's some contention that suggests the labour component of education, the Alberta Teachers' Association, was not involved in consultation leading up to decisions being made on directions for education. Would the minister advise on the consultation opportunities for the ATA, the Alberta Teachers' Association, that have taken place leading up to the development of an education business plan?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly the Alberta Teachers' Association as a very important stakeholder in education in the province is involved in a whole host of activities, and certainly they were included in the steps, in consultation leading up to the development of our business plan. In the fiscal realities conferences of the fall of '92 representatives of the ATA were invited to all of those regional meetings. Secondly, with respect to the roundtables they were involved in the planning process. They were guaranteed a certain number of places at those roundtables. Plus many other teachers were involved in those consultations as well. They have made their own formal presentation with respect to the directions for education. Plus there have been many submissions, many briefs sent in from ATA locals all across the province.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Ask him if they mentioned charter schools.

MR. SMITH: I didn't get that, Mr. Speaker. If he'd repeat it.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Ask him about charter schools.

MR. SPEAKER: Would the hon. Member for Redwater please keep his mouth in the appropriate position for his position in the House at the present time.

MR. SMITH: In what areas of education is the Alberta Teachers' Association recognized as an important stakeholder by the department in the development of education policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Teachers' Association has long been recognized by this government as an important stakeholder in education. Particularly when it comes to the development of curricular materials, when it comes to looking for advice, as I said, on overall directions for education, the ATA has always been very much involved. There is a long list of specific involvement of the association itself and an even longer list of opportunities of individual teachers to be involved in our overall development of policy and consultation process. The members across the way do not seem to recognize this, and I'd be quite prepared to table with the Assembly a list of those steps and those examples of involvement.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister advise us who will be involved in advising the minister on the implementation of directions on educational restructuring?

MR. JONSON: Certainly given the directions that have been set regarding the restructuring of education in the province, there is work to be done on a number of aspects of the implementation of that plan. Last Thursday we launched a consultation process, a series of meetings with respect to the whole area of amalgamation and regionalization, and Alberta School Boards Association and Alberta Teachers' Association representatives were there. There's work to be done with respect to the roles of stakeholders within the system, and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, and the Assembly that there's a role for the ATA in many of these implementation activities.

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

Family and Community Support Services

(continued)

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Community leaders in rural Alberta have been left in an uncertain situation with the news that they were about to lose the one vehicle that allows them to respond quickly to social problems. In the future, services such as Meals on Wheels, women's shelters, and after school care will have to compete with road paving and sewer upgrades in order to survive in rural communities. My question is to the Premier. We both know there is tremendous opposition to this change in funding. Who in rural Alberta told you this change was needed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, especially in rural Alberta the people said to us – and this by the way is reflected in the mandate that we were given on June 15: "Lookit; we can look after ourselves. We are capable of making decisions. We want less not more government. We want the government to streamline administration. We want the government to get rid of red tape and cumbersome regulations." That's what the people in rural Alberta told us: to give them less but better government.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, it's the responsibility of government to look after the disadvantaged. My question is to the Premier. How can you allow the creation of a patchwork FCSS system where those in need of services will have to shop around from district to district in order to get the support they require?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what this tells me is that the hon. member has no faith, no confidence whatsoever in local government. This government has all the confidence in the world in local government, especially those in the rural areas.

MR. CARDINAL: I think it's only fair for Albertans to know that when we're talking about FCSS, a \$36.6 million budget for '93-94, that's only one of many programs that this government provides, Mr. Speaker. My department alone in the next three years will spend over \$4 billion in various forms of programs, and I'll just give you an example of some of the programs that are close to your home here: the inner city alone on contracted agencies will receive – now that's in addition to FCSS funding – \$2.2 million in service delivery contracts; child welfare will receive \$57 million for the inner city; \$42.5 million for persons with disabilities; \$50 million of my budget. . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Final supplemental.

2:00

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: considering the tremendous opposition that's mounting to this program, will the Premier stop this decision from going ahead and save the program that helps so many people?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I've pointed out, the program will go ahead. The fundamental principles of this program are exactly in accordance with what the people of Alberta have told us they want us to do, and that is to streamline administration, reduce the cost of administering these programs, and leave more of the local decision-making in the hands of the people who are best able to make those decisions.

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

Catholic School System

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've attended several school meetings in Calgary-Egmont in both separate and public school systems, and I've observed that certain interest groups and, sadly, certain politicians from that side of the House appear to be engaging in fear mongering with respect to education in Alberta. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition in his reply to the throne speech talked about Catholics under siege. Would the hon. Minister of Education dispel this irresponsible behaviour and provide Catholic school supporters in this province with the facts with respect to his restructuring plans?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, yes, it is unfortunate that there's been a considerable amount of misinformation and, I think, incitement going on. First of all, I think it should always be kept in mind that the record of the government for many years, going back to the beginning of the government two decades ago, has always been one of being very fair and recognizing the constitutional situation, the constitutional rights with respect to separate schools in this province. I think that if we were to examine the record of various changes in legislation that have been made over those years, that has certainly proven correct.

With respect to the recently announced initiatives, Mr. Speaker, nothing in those initiatives prejudices in any way the existence of the separate Catholic school system in this province. The system of funding, as one example, which is designed to be fair and equitable and has certainly been something that Catholic school

boards across this province have asked for, is just one illustration of what I am saying.

MR. HERARD: My first supplemental to the minister: will Catholic school boards still be able to satisfy their right to safeguard the values that they consider important in the selection of Catholic school superintendents?

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the separate Catholic school systems, the school boards of this province can be assured that superintendent candidates who are Catholics, who can maintain the ethical and spiritual values and nature of the Catholic school system will be hired, will be selected.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will school boards exercise their right to fire school superintendents for just cause under this proposed plan?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in the steps that we have outlined with respect to the appointment of superintendents, we have also outlined the steps that are involved with respect to the hon. member's question. First of all, anyone appointed as a superintendent would be on a probationary period. Secondly, with respect to the possible removal of a superintendent, the role of the school board in making a recommendation in that regard is certainly recognized.

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

Social Assistance

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No consultation, no roundtables to hear concerns, and no concerns for Albertans living in poverty: this is the program reform process in Family and Social Services. Albertans on fixed low incomes are losing their ability to provide the basic necessities for themselves and their families. My questions are to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Who advised the minister that poor Albertans could do with less food, less for clothing, and less for shelter?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated to this House before, I've been working personally along with departmental staff for close to 10 years on proposed changes in the welfare system and how it's delivered. The plan we've put forward is to redirect dollars. In the past nine months you can see that we've done that. We've reduced the caseload by 27,500. Eight thousand of those students are presently attending different forms of training programs, and that is exactly what this whole process was designed to do. While we've done that in the last eight months, we've had the opportunity to redirect close to \$100 million into the high-needs area of the department. I believe that's what Albertans out there want. I believe that's what the clients want. The clients do not want handouts. They want meaningful training and meaningful jobs wherever possible.

MR. SEKULIC: Since the reductions on October 31 there's been no increase, no redirecting of funds, Mr. Minister. When will the minister follow through on his promise to redirect moneys saved from the welfare cuts to make sure that Albertans on assistance receive and have enough for basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter?

MR. CARDINAL: From talking to the clients out there, they want more dollars for jobs and training programs. That's exactly what the welfare reforms have allowed us to do. This year alone we've transferred \$64 million to various forms of training programs which are employing and training thousands of welfare clients that would not have had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, without the reforms. I believe the healthiest way to assist people is to get them a job, a training program and for them to be independent and self-sufficient, not more handouts through welfare.

MR. SEKULIC: Mr. Minister, landlords did not reduce their rents. Clients had to take it out of their food budgets. Will kindergarten user fees for social allowance recipients be covered by your department, or will parents have to take this as well out of their food budgets?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, any new issue of that nature that comes forward this minister is willing to review on an individual basis. There is a process out there. If a person is declined for assistance, they can appeal the process. After the appeal they can reapply, and when they do reapply, this minister will personally assist the individuals if that's what they want.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Education wishes to augment the answer.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to just supplement the hon. minister's answer by indicating that in the initiatives being undertaken by Alberta Education will be, as I've referred to previously in this Assembly, an education opportunity grant, which is particularly targeted at the high-needs students of the inner cities of this province, of Edmonton and Calgary.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vegreville-Viking.

Social Services Office Closure

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. The Department of Family and Social Services has certainly seen a dramatic drop in caseload over the past 10 months. Has this drop in caseload resulted in any office closures?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, part of the plan is to always make sure that the dollars that are in my budget go to the client as much as possible. There will be some streamlining taking place. An example of this: at the end of January the Smoky Lake suboffice was closed, and a once a month visiting office will be reopened in the health unit at a much cheaper cost. The residents from that area will also have a 1-800 number to receive assistance as required.

2:10

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, could the minister advise this House as to what business criteria were followed in closing the office, meaning the staffing and caseload mix?

MR. CARDINAL: Basically, Mr. Speaker, as we streamline the department and reduce the caseloads and redirect the dollars to more productive purposes such as employment and training, we have to look also at the workload standards for our workers. In this particular case, we had three permanent workers and one part-time person. We're down to 91 files in that office. Therefore, the

caseload did not allow us to continue with all the positions in that office.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister advise this House as to what will happen to the three former staff at the Smoky Lake office?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated to this Assembly, because of the issue of high caseloads for our workers, even though we've reduced the caseload by over 27,000, we haven't laid off any staff. In this particular case, what we've done is reallocated the three individuals to three other permanent positions, and one individual has left the department.

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

Family and Community Support Services (continued)

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier deflected legitimate questions of concerns to Albertans by referring to them as fear mongering questions. Well, it does appear that Albertans are afraid, and now local government appears to be afraid of how the FCSS grants will be handled in the future. My questions today are to the Premier. When the mayor of Calgary refers to this process as being fundamentally wrong, is he simply fear mongering?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, when the mayor of Calgary understands completely what the program is all about, I don't think he'll be concerned at all. I indicated to the mayor in a meeting on Friday that part of this is fundamentally to streamline the administration of the services, and they will still be able to provide funds for FCSS services. We will not lose the flow-through benefits of the Canada assistance grants, and they will be able to participate as a municipality, as they have participated in the past. What's the problem?

MR. GERMAIN: I was happy that the Premier didn't want to ask the mayor of Calgary a question.

I wonder: when the mayor of Strathmore refers to this as an indirect way to cut FCSS grants, is he fear mongering?

Speaker's Ruling **Seeking Opinions**

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair overlooked the request for an opinion from the Premier on the first question, but the hon. member shouldn't go through a series of questions on what the Premier's opinions are on things.

Family and Community Support Services (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you're absolutely right. I had the opportunity of speaking directly with the mayor of Calgary on Friday, so I thought it was quite appropriate to answer the hon. member's question. As to the mayor of Strathmore, I have not spoken with the mayor of Strathmore on this particular issue, nor have I spoken to any mayor about those leaders of municipalities fear mongering. I have only talked about the Liberals fear mongering and spreading doom and gloom and misery.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for the error in framing my last question.

To the Premier: if this government is truly bent on preserving FCSS projects in the communities as being worth while, why don't they simply guarantee the funding for that head of funding?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly ask the hon. Member for Fort McMurray to be patient and to see what is contained in the budget. I think that he will be reasonably satisfied – I say reasonably satisfied because he will never be totally satisfied – that communities who want to provide services under the family and community support services program will be able to do that and will be even in a better position to set their own priorities.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. minister wishes to augment.

MR. CARDINAL: I'd just like to briefly supplement that, Mr. Speaker, as a former municipal councillor, two different councils, sat on two different FCSS boards. As far as I know, the priorities of programs were always set by municipalities at the local level along with community organizations. The budgets were always set by the municipalities and the community organizations. The province has never set the budgets, and the municipalities are capable to do that job.

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

Tobacco Taxes

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are concerned about the growing incidence of smoking, particularly amongst our young people. They're also very upset with the confusing actions that are coming out of the federal government as well as the actions of Quebec, New Brunswick, and Ontario. My first question is to the Minister of Health. Would the minister advise this Assembly what actions Canada health ministers are taking to put a stop to more young Albertans taking up cancer sticks?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, provincial and territorial ministers of health with the exception of Quebec and New Brunswick did release a communiqué from their meetings on February 9. We were very, very disturbed with the federal government's decision to lower taxes. As studies indicate clearly, there is a direct correlation between increase in consumption and price, particularly with young people, and that concerns us greatly. I'd be happy to file with the Legislature the communiqué that I spoke from.

We're very concerned about this impact, and we've asked the federal Minister of Health to direct the dollars that she has available for education to community programs in our province. We feel that our communities are in a better position to spend those dollars efficiently. We're also going to proceed with other initiatives that we think might assist in counteracting these very negative effects on youthful smokers. There is legislation in effect federally to increase the age for sales of cigarettes to young people to 18. I would expect a request from the federal government for assistance in enforcement of that to come to our province.

I think it was a serious concern to all ministers of health across Canada when the decision was made to reduce taxes on cigarettes.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Provincial Treasurer. Why have four governments including Ottawa dropped their taxes when the lower cigarette prices would entice young people to take up and keep smoking?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, from the information I have from the federal government and from those three governments, the facts are that they have said that they want to take away the financial incentive for illegally moving cigarettes and other tobacco in and out of their jurisdictions. While we are concerned – and the hon. Minister of Health has outlined our concern – about young people taking up smoking and even some people continuing to smoke, there has not been a history in this province of tobacco smuggling. There hasn't been a history of significant tobacco smuggling until the Liberal government in Ottawa went to work on this problem, and here we have four western provinces very concerned about the domino effect across the rest of this country. The federal Liberal government, having induced Quebec, New Brunswick, and Ontario into dropping their taxes, is now causing the potential domino effect across the country. Now, that's a typical approach to Liberal politics.

2:20

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Provincial Treasurer outline what steps this government is taking to deal with this issue considering that they remain opposed to dropping taxes?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the four western finance ministers indicated publicly yesterday after Ontario was the next one to fall – the four western finance ministers and the two territorial leaders rejected a reduction in provincial tobacco taxes at this time. Instead, what we're trying to do is implement a co-ordinated strategy across the six western jurisdictions. Our focus is going to be on enforcement, on increasing investigations and audit activity, on increasing co-operation among provincial officials, Revenue Canada as well as the RCMP and local municipal police forces. We're looking at stiffer fines and penalties for the possession and sale of illegal tobacco, and legislation is going to be looked at to require tobacco manufacturers to mark tobacco products that are sold in provinces not already marking tobacco.

Mr. Speaker, the one concern we have is that here we have the federal government in Ottawa levying different rates of taxation on different Canadians, depending upon where they live. I think that sets a very, very unfortunate, the wrong kind of precedent in a country of 10 provinces and two territories where all Canadians are equal. My concern is that the Liberal government in Ottawa is taking this kind of approach, and it's not fair to Canadians.

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

Utility Tax Rebate

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1990 this Tory government, one of the last Tory governments, imposed a tax grab on Albertans by eliminating the provincial income tax utility rebate. This tax has added 6 percent to the utility bills of Albertans, and now the federal government has no incentive to keep their rebate, which is therefore going to cost Albertans \$200 million a year. My question is to the Deputy Premier. What steps

is the minister for the Alberta advantage prepared to take to eliminate his government's 6 percent tax grab?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, it was not too long ago in fact that Alberta took the first major initiative with respect to this: creating a Tax Reform Commission. This Tax Reform Commission has in recent days made public its report. I would really look forward to having a debate in this Assembly with respect to all of the submissions made by the Tax Reform Commission. I would sincerely hope that my Liberal colleague would in fact make sure that he does the right thing and calls his buddies in Ottawa in the next few minutes to make sure that they do not invoke more economic warfare in the hearts and minds of the people of this country.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: How can the Deputy Premier talk about maintaining the Alberta advantage when he voted in favour of this 6 percent tax grab on Albertans in July of 1990?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, there are many advantages of living in the province of Alberta. For the hon. member to say that in July of 1990 – I can't even recall if the Assembly was sitting in July of 1990, nor the subject member at hand. Clearly, Alberta does have a major advantage. Now, it may very well be true that within the next few minutes from now many of the advantages that the citizens of this province have may in fact be diminished. [interjections] We would sincerely hope, in fact, that the taxes borne . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: It seems like some members do not want to hear some comments.

The hon. minister.

MR. KOWALSKI: At this very time in fact a new federal budget is coming down, and I was going to conclude by saying that I would sincerely hope the penalties imposed upon Albertans as citizens of Canada and in fact the penalties imposed on all Canadians by this new Liberal government will not be so severe, Mr. Speaker, that in essence they will continue to tax away the Alberta advantage. All Albertans know that this government is totally opposed to the GST. We took the federal government to court on it. Now it's time for the Liberals to maintain their election promise and eliminate the GST.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: My final question is to the Minister of Energy. How can the minister hope to have any credibility with Ottawa in preserving the federal rebate when she and six other cabinet ministers also voted in favour of imposing this tax grab on Alberta's energy industry?

MR. N. TAYLOR: A woman with a past.

MRS. BLACK: It's kind of like the pot calling the kettle black in here. I remember back in April of 1991, Mr. Speaker, when the hon. Member for Redwater yelled across this House to bring back a national energy program.

Since becoming the Minister of Energy on December 15, 1992, under two governments federally I have made the position quite clear that Alberta is unique in that Alberta is one of the few places in North America that has a combination of publicly and privately owned utility companies and that certainly any changes to the tax regulations from the federal government that would hurt that industry would not be very acceptable to Albertans.

Further to that, I would ask . . . [interjections] Obviously, Mr. Speaker, they don't want the answer, but I will give the answer in any event, because I think it's important for all Albertans to realize this government's position.

We have gone and made our position very clear to the former Conservative minister of energy, mines and resources as well as to the current minister of energy, mines and resources and asked that they consider the continuation of this tax concession that would flow through mainly to Albertans.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I find it amazing that the hon. Member for Calgary-West would stand up here today and announce something that he thinks will be in the federal budget before that budget comes out.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Barley Marketing

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An issue that's been on the back burner of the federal government for the past couple of months is that of the continental barley market. During the short six weeks that it was in place during the middle of last year, it moved over half a million tonnes at a superior price that was contracted by producers. I would like the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to please give this House an updated report on the status of the continental barley market.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly an issue of great importance to the agricultural community. As a matter of fact, last week I had the opportunity of participating at the barley growers' convention, where the issue was really stressed as to the importance to the barley growers within this province as well as all of western Canada.

As the hon. member rightfully pointed out, during that short period of six weeks there was somewhere between a half million and a million tonnes of barley moved into the United States at a premium of up to 70 cents a bushel. So it's very, very significant. It's an issue that the barley growers themselves are pursuing very vigorously, but they've also obtained a lot of help from other groups, other grain growers within part of western Canada. It's an issue that they don't plan on allowing to lie dormant. So it's something that's very meaningful, and we as a provincial government will be working hand in hand with the barley growers to try and open that additional market opportunity to allow the barley growers to have diversified market opportunities.

2:30

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister please tell me and constituents who have raised this issue what steps you are taking towards restoration of the continental barley market?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly these are exciting times, because these are times of opportunity. We're living in rapidly changing times, and what we are going to have to do and what we're going to be pressing the federal government

with is to restructure the opportunity for the grain producers to be able to access the additional markets that are out there. Perhaps this is the time to be looking at the Wheat Board, because with the advent of GATT, with the advent of NAFTA indeed the Wheat Board is going to have to become more transparent. Perhaps this is a time to be urging the Wheat Board to develop a process whereby they have one process for offshore and another process for onshore marketing. Indeed, we are going to play a very active role in trying to establish additional markets for the barley growers in this province.

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, until such time as this continental barley market issue is finally resolved, would the minister please tell the producers prior to the spring seeding plans what other options are available to market their grain in lieu of a continental barley market?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Indeed, we have not given up on the continental barley market. It is our intention to meet with the federal minister and urge him to reinstitute the opportunities that the continental barley market allowed our barley producers in the province. There are other areas as well that allow for opportunity in barley marketing. I refer to the new malt plant established in Alix, which indeed is going to be taking almost double the volumes of malting barley that we were producing in the past. There are areas such as the hull-less barley opportunities that our research department has developed. We had to allow for a whole new area of market growth and market development. There are such things as the starch plant, which the barley growers are promoting at this time, which will allow for additional barley marketing opportunities. So we're quite active in the whole area of trying to allow the barley growers additional advantage in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: The time for question period has expired.

head: Members' Statements

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

Community Schools

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, on November 9 of 1993 I had the opportunity along with my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark to make a private member's statement about the future and the role of the community school. I regret that my colleague and I were not more persuasive on November 9.

In the Speech from the Throne the government has said, and I quote, that

it will continue to eliminate waste and duplication, and it will continue to find new ways of providing essential services at a cost that Albertans can afford.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't matter how hard we look or how far we look in this province; we could not find a better model for providing co-ordinated essential services than the community school. We've got 66 of these excellent models in this province.

The government talked about a "brighter future." Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't see a brighter future for those Alberta children now attending a community school. Numerous studies have demonstrated that it's not a question of spending more money in the classroom. It's not a question of more principals or assistant principals. What does enhance the educational experience for children is involving their parents, their families, and the whole community. That's the one way we know we will give our children absolutely the best educational experience possible.

We're taking that away when we dismantle the 66 community schools. So far all we have is a vague promise that there may be some money for inner-city children. Well, I think the government should reconsider. I urge them to consider supporting these 66 community schools. More importantly, I urge them to consider taking that model that works so well. Whether it's the Nicholas Sheran school in Lethbridge, whether it's the Ashmont school near St. Paul, or the school in Nanton: take that model. We can add onto it. Don't eliminate the one model that works.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Boy Scouts and Girl Guides

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For millions of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides around the world today commemorates the birthday of Robert Baden-Powell. I would like to take this opportunity to bring this to your attention and to recognize the scouting and guiding movement in Canada.

The scouts and guides work with young people, as you know, to become resourceful and responsible citizens. Robert Baden-Powell, then lieutenant general in the British army, started the Boy Scout movement in 1907 after holding a camp for about 20 boys just off the coast of southern England. Scouting came to Canada the following year and was granted a royal charter throughout the Commonwealth by King George V. Girl Guides was founded in 1909, and its first Canadian troop was formed in 1910 under the patronage of Lady Baden-Powell. Today, as you know, there are many millions of scouts and guides from nearly every country around the globe. In Canada there are close to 500,000 members, and they are involved in all levels of the scouting and guiding movement. More importantly, they are supported by thousands and thousands of volunteers and dedicated leaders. Many local groups, communities, churches, service clubs, and professional associations also use this opportunity to work with young people, serving as role models in a forum that they uniquely call their own. I might also add that to show that the movement does progress, it has now gone co-ed throughout most of our country.

In addition to a lot of the outdoor activities and helping young people with some of the survival skills and planning and career areas that they wish to work on, the scouting and guiding movement continues to promote tolerance and understanding, which is the basis and the root of the strength of our province.

There are many opportunities, of course, for just plain fun. As you know, in Canada we have hosted a number of the world jamborees, most recently in 1983 when the scout association hosted the 15th annual world jamboree in Kananaskis.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Family and Community Support Services

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought it was appropriate today to share something with this Assembly because we were talking about FCSS grants. Last night I got a phone call at my home from a very distressed teenager who had once again been beaten by her father. Because she's a friend of my daughter, she phoned my home. I phoned the emergency crisis line, and I got some very capable help there. That woman calmed me down and phoned the girl and calmed her down. Then she contacted the RCMP. The RCMP went to that home, talked to the family, and took the daughter to the RCMP station, at which point I was

phoned and made a trip to the station and picked her up. So she is safe for the time being.

Because of things like that I'm worried about these grants not going to the right place. This family needs counseling; that comes from FCSS grants. That family can be made whole again with help. That's what I would like to see, and that's why I'm concerned about where these grants are going. If we are to accept this new model that the minister is proposing, then all the onus will be put on the family. Where would that girl have gone? Who would have helped her? This situation is classic. She would have had to stay in the same situation before anything would have been done. Clearly it is time to rethink this dangerous and insensitive proposal.

Point of Order Seeking Opinions

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Member for Calgary-North West has a point of order.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period the Member for Calgary-Currie asked the Treasurer why other governments would make changes to their tax regime. I bring your attention to *Beauchesne* 410(10), which says:

The subject matter of questions must be within the collective responsibility of the Government or the individual responsibilities of Ministers.

As far as I know, the Provincial Treasurer's responsibilities don't go beyond the borders of Alberta. He has difficulty enough there, it seems.

Further, 409(3) says, "The question ought to seek information and . . . cannot seek an opinion," which also went beyond the bounds of that particular question.

I'm not sure what it is about that particular chair, Mr. Speaker, but when the Treasurer rose, he went on at length, and I would draw the Chair's attention to 410(7) that says, "Brevity both in questions and answers is of great importance."

So I would ask that you advise the government members to make sure their questions are in fact of an appropriate nature to be asked in this House.

MR. SPEAKER: I know the hon. Deputy Government House Leader wishes to participate, but the Chair did intervene earlier in question period about questions from the opposition side asking for an opinion. The Chair really does believe that perhaps the Chair erred in not noticing the import of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie's question in this regard. The Chair will try to do better.

2:40 Orders of the Day

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

Bill 202 Alberta Task Force on Education Act

[Adjourned debate February 16: Dr. Massey]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spent a few minutes last day outlining the possibilities, some of the kinds of work that I think the task force might undertake, and that included some social forecasts and the need to work with Albertans to establish goals.

I think there are three additional areas that such a task force might explore, and that is to look at the organization of the education system in the province, to look at the authority of local boards, to look at the erosion of autonomy of the universities in this province. So I think there are a number of organizational issues that a task force could bring into perspective for us.

I think they also need to look at the support services that are available for students, the personnel that we have in our classrooms and laboratories, to look at certification requirements and how they might be improved, to look at the kind of facilities and facility planning that needs to be undertaken so that we don't have the situation we have in Medicine Hat with the college and its deteriorating physical plant, so that we don't have the University of Alberta residences and the problems we're having there with the structures not being safe in some cases. I think they have to look at the learning resources that are available to students.

Then finally I think they have to address very seriously the problem of finance. How should our education system be financed? What is the role of local ratepayers in the K to 12 system? What is the role at the postsecondary system of tuition? What is the government's responsibility in securing the kinds of resources that are needed if we're to have the kind of education system that all Albertans can agree upon?

The province of New Brunswick just recently had such a commission, and they reported in 1992 in a document called *Schools for a New Century: Report of the Commission on Excellence in Education*. They had as their goal fostering excellence in education, training, and human resource development through a broad consultative process. Mr. Speaker, it's my hope that that's what this Bill would provide for all Albertans, and I urge all members to support the Bill.

Thank you very much.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to use this opportunity to speak about educational reform. I do regret that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not here to hear my comments.

**Speaker's Ruling
Referring to the Absence of a Member**

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, we're not allowed, by custom, courtesy, and rules, to refer to the absence or indeed the departing, in case someone is in the act of doing so, from the Chamber.

MRS. BURGNER: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Debate Continued

MRS. BURGNER: This Bill gives me a great deal of concern. The reason it does so is because it tells me why our educational system is in such great need of reform, because the implication of instituting a task force to review education implies, in my opinion, that the full set of solutions and the issues and the problems with respect to education in this province can possibly be handled and dealt with within the scope of a task force.

In my opinion, what has arrived in Alberta is the information age. It has arrived in our schools and in the communities, and I regret that it is not understood fully in the opposition. The information age by its very nature means that information is

simultaneously heard and understood and comprehended. One of the reasons we have such a great interest in education is because these issues are on the table, shared by many, many Albertans. They go way beyond the scope of a 14-member task force. In the past the task force would have the responsibility and the opportunity to develop public awareness, to go and seek local solutions, to define the issues in order to assist government in coming to some appropriate conclusions about legislation and about the development of social policy. We've seen examples of that in the past in the bilingualism and biculturalism task forces that were in place and just recently in the Francophone governance task forces that were initiated by the government where in order to fully recognize the responsibility of government, social policy required an information component.

Honoured colleagues, I would suggest to you that in the realm of education that era has long passed. The concern for reform in education is on the national agenda. It has gone beyond a local concern or a concern even confined within one party. The concern for educational reform is also economically driven. That is not to say that business drives the agenda of education but that the stakeholders go beyond the teachers, the students, the classroom, and the parents. We have a concern in our country of being competitive in a world market, and we need the input of business as we reflect on reforms in education.

Education also has hit a cultural nerve. We have a very diverse community across Canada. Our immigration policies have allowed that to develop, so we have to look at the educational reform within a cultural context as well.

Education reform is socially driven. We have communities where children have the opportunity to use and utilize some of the most scientific and best developed technologies. We have other communities where that is not available. We can't allow those social inequities to continue to occur. So, in my sense, to limit our ability to develop and capture this national interest in education by striking a task force would do a disservice to our students.

Let's look at the past briefly, within a decade, about what issues have come forward for discussion. I had the opportunity to attend a conference in Washington, D.C., when I was a trustee with the Calgary Catholic school board when they were in preparation for their decade-long review of education. That process identified everything from Head Start programs to local community solutions to business partnerships to restructuring in technology. Ladies and gentlemen, that was five years ago that that started.

We also had a situation in the United States where President Bush recognized the role of parochial schools for having been able to achieve goals and standards outside the public school process. The striking recognition in that system was the input and the support of parents in the community for education. Ladies and gentlemen, that was over five years ago.

More recently, in Canada, about three years ago the Conference Board of Canada held a major seminar in the city of Calgary where they looked at some of the significant weaknesses in our education system, not to drive the agenda, not to usurp the roles and responsibilities of school boards or teachers but to simply tell us in plain language: these are the skills and these are the talents that we need in the future employees of this country, and we are committed to take on a responsibility in identifying that problem and supporting it through business.

We've also seen a number of discussions nationally and internationally on the role of employer training and the lifelong responsibilities of education. We know that Canada lags far behind a number of countries in recognizing the responsibility and the role of employers to maintain an educated and trained work force. In addition, we have the concerns of the European models

and the southeast Asian models of education. We can be critical of classroom sizes and standards; we talk about suicide rates: there are a number of issues that come from looking at those models. The fact of the matter is that we have standards and goals and those are now part of the provincial expectations of education. These are the kinds of issues that our parents want to see, and I daresay these are the kind of concerns that a number of students strive for. I have a great deal of regret in my heart to think that we would go back and sit out 18 months instead of recognizing an opportunity to seize on a number of the significant areas wherein we are wanting to act and the parents and the students themselves have told us to act.

2:50

Quite recently the Prime Minister recognized a number of Alberta teachers for excellence in science and technology and math. When we have that kind of expertise recognized nationally, I do believe that we are on the right track in coming to terms with what the strengths of our system are. I believe that the school boards, the ATA have worked very hard to focus on the strengths of our teachers. The fact that these awards both provincially and nationally are now being recognized for the high excellence standards that they set is an important element.

In addition, we have thousands of students who access through our Rutherford scholarship and a variety of other scholarships, oh, hundreds of thousands of dollars. They are awards for their hard efforts. These are not students who are always the most exceptional, the most gifted, who come from the most financially advantaged families. This is a way of recognizing that within our student body right now is a crying need for addressing the educational reforms that are before us.

We have received a lot of criticism from parents and from teachers on the two, I'd say, driving pieces of literature right now in the public domain, both *School's Out* and *Failing Grades*. What I find significant about that is that these are people who observe the school system both from without, in the case of Andrew Nikiforuk, and from within, as a parent, a taxpayer, through Dr. Freedman, trying to come to terms with the weaknesses in our system.

We also have phenomenally the strength of technology, an area, quite frankly, that we have yet to even come to terms with. We have yet to determine through school boards and through the government what kind of resources we are going to put in place to deal with it. I had the opportunity to listen to Dr. Tomorrow, Frank Ogden, when he spoke about schools for the 21st century. He talked about computers and satellites in a way that is not even yet within our kind of ability to grasp simply because we don't have the resources nor do we have the forward thinking as educators and as parents, but I daresay our children do. One of the significant models he talked about that I believe we have to recognize is that parents and students are not going to sit back and wait for school boards and governments to determine what they'll learn and how they'll learn it, because technology will allow them to access these programs through satellite delivered to their homes, that through public scrutiny can be tested, and while I know there's a major concern for the socialization process of education, quite frankly, as we get more and more competitive, we have to find ways to allow students to access technology and utilize it. The longer we sit back and fear it or study it rather than embrace it and commit to it, the more we are doing a disservice to our students. We cannot possibly educate our children without a serious look at technology.

We have to look at the change in the configuration of our physical school plants. We have to bring them up to speed with

the ways that students learn. We have to talk about the technology in the libraries. We have to look at the fact that they have modems; they access research at the university, nationally, and internationally. The longer we sit and think these issues have to be dealt with, I suspect that we'll see and continue to see growing discontent with some of our students and our parents.

We've talked about the linkage between education and advanced education. Quite often that is a subject of debate: whether we should amalgamate those two departments or make appropriate linkages. I think we have to go beyond just a question of education and embrace the fact that not just educational institutions have a handle on how to educate. The fear of privatization, quite frankly, is something that has to be put to rest. We have models in Calgary right now, through the Columbia Institute, for example, where it is true that students do pay a private fee, a higher fee for certain courses than they would if they were taking them in the public domain. I will tell you that they finish those courses sooner. The impact of that on students is phenomenal, particularly if they are raising a family on their own, doing upgrading, trying to compete for the job market. The sooner and the more efficiently they can get through the school system the better.

We still work in this model of school being September to June, and in fact we resist any support for year-round schooling because we're afraid of it. In some of the studies that came out of the advanced education roundtables, quite frankly one of the most startling figures had to do with the fact that the majority of students in some of our postsecondary institutions, in fact the vast majority of some of them, are not full-time students. They are not there from September to June; they are there on a part-time basis upgrading, finishing a degree. In other words, they have found a way to address their educational responsibilities and personal goals within their social context of a job, a family, a work initiative, and we as yet maintain this fixed structure that everyone goes to school in September and finishes in May. We have got to be prepared to reform education to recognize just who is attending these institutions and what limitations they may have with respect to attending class on an ongoing basis.

I am quite excited by the fact that we have already identified and recognized seven areas of reform which have to be taken back to the community. This has come out of the roundtables; this has come out of the 20,000-plus submissions. I know there's a lot of concern about where those messages and reports have gone. Quite frankly, between the Alberta School Boards Association, the ATA, the municipalities, and the thousands and thousands of concerned parents and communities the key areas that need assistance are the amalgamation and regionalization of school boards. We have also to look at roles, and those include school councils, schools, school boards, and superintendents. That whole issue of governance is strong because people would like to have an understanding of where their input is, what their responsibilities are. They cannot be predetermined for them, but the concern for it and the need to have a voice is clearly on the table. I do not believe we have to sit back for 18 months and try to figure out just how important that is. We have been told.

The fiscal framework – the issue of revenue, the cost of funding education – is a major concern. It has been identified by this government that we will be working toward deficit elimination by 1997, and that forms part of our fiscal framework. We have a problem with equity. We have a problem with school jurisdictions which are struggling with a limited ability to raise the revenues and resources that will allow them to give their students the same opportunities that we demand as a government. If we are going to hold our students accountable to meet standards, we have to give them those opportunities. So the fiscal framework and

revenue issue is a significant one. It's been raised around the province. Again, it is already on the table. We don't have to go back and investigate how serious the problem is.

We have a question of accountability. Every time you mention testing, you get one side of the coin talking about the curriculum, teaching to the test. On the other side you have the disadvantaged student. What about the student who is an overachiever? We have to find a way to bring our students to a provincial standard that we as the government can stand back and applaud, that we can turn and say to our students, "We have given you the best that we can, and you are free to go forward."

Currently in this country of ours if you want to apply to the military, for instance, and you finish your high school, they are able to track from what province you come, where you would place in their admittance structure because of the significant variations in standards across this country. My personal feeling on this issue: quite frankly, it is a tragic situation that nationally we have yet to define an education structure and process for our students that allows in this age of mobility and transfer a student from one province to move to the next without being educationally disadvantaged. That whole issue of accountability I think is going to be a key area. I don't believe we can turn around and say to our students, "You shall be successful," that we are going to reward school districts because "You will graduate students who are successful," but we ourselves as a province and as a nation have yet to determine what that accountability will be. That's on the table; we don't need to go back and think about it for 18 more months.

3:00

The issue of business involvement is a highly sensitive one. There are two sides to the argument every time you raise it: business shouldn't be driving the decisions of the government with respect to education, but on the other hand you have teaching methods and teaching programs and curriculum that no longer meet the goals and aspirations of the economic community that our young people want to find meaningful employment in. It would be remiss of us to shut them out. They're taking a leadership role; in fact, I believe they're writing cheques at this point. So they are our main players, and I think it's critical that we recognize this, not fight it, but partner with it. A number of school jurisdictions have already embraced this. A number of local high schools and individual school communities are way ahead – way ahead – of any task force on this issue. To sit on the fence and discuss it for 18 months would be a tragedy, in my mind, because it leaves business in a situation where that has not been dealt with, and again it disadvantages students.

A sixth area, which is key to the resolution of our education reforms, is the role of the teacher. I regret, fundamentally, that we have to deal with teaching often in the context of union and don't have the opportunity to talk about the strengths of the classroom teacher, the aspirations they have for each one of their students, the commitment that they give, and the support they have from their own individual parents and communities. We have to find a way to support the teaching profession. We have to look at it in preparation, in competencies. We have to look at the Teaching Profession Act. We have to look at the departments of education, how they teach, what they teach. We see a variation within this province of students who are in the education faculties. In Lethbridge you do some practicum in just about your first year. In other institutions you do it in your third or fourth year, which may be too late to find out that it isn't exactly what you thought it would be or that the pressures of the classroom aren't exactly what you want or can handle. By then you're so far into the

commitment to your own educational goals that it's difficult to switch. We have to work around a significantly strong union that has had a goal and a responsibility over the past 20 years but, in talking to a number of teachers, has changed. We need a vehicle to have that conversation.

I guess the final area in which I think we'll see some changes that is on the table at this point is legislation. There is an element that is coming through with the business plan process – in my personal opinion it has been lost on the community – and that is the streamlining of legislation. We have talked about health care reform, and we know that layers and layers and layers of legislation have built up in order to provide health care. We are looking at streamlining it to meet the need of the patient in the community. The same situation exists in education. We have legislation which prohibits, prevents, negates, enables. There's a whole slew of pieces of legislation which impact directly on the ability of students to access the best and of parents to choose and of teachers to follow their students and bring initiatives forward. We have a series of governance regulations with respect to our school councils, which were identified when they redid the School Act in 1988 and which a number of school boards have gone forward and acted on, but it is not provincially. My concern is that we seriously look at legislation and what the roles and responsibilities are in that regard.

I am excited about education reform. I am not excited about an 18-month task force. I am glad that this government is on record as moving forward now in education restructuring.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre.

MR. HENRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been reflecting on the comments from the Member for Calgary-Currie. One thing I did want to point out to her is that the task force that's being proposed in this piece of legislation – and I assume she's read it – is allowed up to 18 months to review and to report. Last I checked, up to 18 months was not. . . [interjection] She's read it she's told me. I understand she's been hearing bells, and I hope those are from the bench behind her and not in her own head. The task force can report within 18 months. I might point out that the government has alluded to the fact that several MLA task forces are going to go across this province to solicit more input, that may or may not be listened to, from the people of Alberta. I might suggest to the hon. member that the key difference between what the Minister of Education has indicated will be happening and this piece of legislation is the composition of the task forces. Rather than government MLAs, who have already made their decisions on education, listening to or hearing from Albertans, it will be a group of independent individuals who will report to the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, there are many issues in education. I would like to touch on a few of those issues, but I wanted to outline really clearly why I believe it's important for us to take a deep breath and to talk with Albertans and receive input from Albertans and discuss the future of our education system. The government and the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie are correct. There have been a number of little studies, there have been a number of little pilots, there have been a number of little discussions about this aspect of education and that aspect of education and a conference on the information age, but nowhere has anybody actually sat down and looked at what it is we want our education system to be for the next generation. Consequently, what we've ended up with is a lot of tinkering with our system, a lot of messing about with our system, and frankly a lot of disco-ordinated if I can use that term,

changing of our system, which has actually not articulated any sort of vision with regard to what our education system will be like.

Frankly, when I received the first draft copy of this piece of legislation, I thought that perhaps after the last year the government might come out with a paper or with some sort of statement that would define its education system or where it believes Albertans want the education system to go. I thought, as the Minister of Education has often said, that after two years of fiscal realities conferences or meetings where, by invitation only, school officials could come and hear about what the former Minister of Education and current Treasurer thought the fiscal realities were; then after Meeting the Challenge, which was released by the government in September of last year and discussed four major issues, those being defining a basic education, funding education in Alberta, measuring results in education, and changing the delivery of education; then after two roundtables, at which – and I'll give the minister some credit here – there was fairly broad representation from around the various stakeholder groups that, I point out to the Member for Calgary-Currie, not only included the traditional stakeholders in education but also included members of the business community and members of labour in Alberta; after somewhere over 27,000 copies of this booklet were delivered across Alberta; and after, I understand, almost 20,000 responded to the ministry; then after many public meetings sponsored by various interest groups, because the government wasn't willing to have any more meetings, whether it be the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Calgary Catholic school board, parent council associations, associations serving children with special needs: after all of these groups had their input, I thought that the government might be willing to sit down and actually talk about some of the issues and, perhaps from the input that's been given, outline its vision.

Well, I sat on the edge of my seat while His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor read the throne speech. [interjection] On the edge of my seat, hon. Member for Redwater. I thought we were going to be seeing a vision of education for the future. I scramble to open to the section on education, and what do I see? I see the government's going to bring in amendments to the School Act to establish full provincial funding, addressing the equity question – that's one issue – to reduce the number of school boards, to streamline administration, to bring in charter schools, and to provide education in accordance with constitutional guarantees; period. There was no discussion of some of the major issues. All of the items in the throne speech that have been articulated by this government are procedural or organizational in nature. None of these attack some of the very basic issues that are facing our education system today.

3:10

Some of the issues include, Mr. Speaker, the dropout rate. We have an alarmingly high dropout rate in our province. I wish I could stand here and tell you that it's 13 percent, as some studies have suggested, 16 percent, 23 percent, 30 percent, as high as 34 percent. The reality is that we don't know and the government doesn't know. We have anecdotal evidence that tells us that we have a high dropout rate. We see a lot of young people applying for jobs who have not finished high school, who are ending up on social assistance or ending up on UIC because they don't have the job skills to retain or to get jobs, but this government has never addressed the issue of determining how many people in our education system actually complete. We don't know. The studies are varied, anywhere from 12 percent to 13 percent up to the one-third rate, because we don't track whether a student who drops out of one institution registers in another or drops out for six months

and re-registers. We don't know. We do know that we have a dropout rate that is high; we don't know exactly how high. The government has not laid out any plans to look at how we track that, to look at what we can do about that. Regardless of whether you think the number is 12 percent or 13 percent or whether you think the number is over 30 percent, depending on which study you read, we have not talked about what we do about that. We do know that the current high school education is not appropriate for some young people. We have not seen this government talk about providing alternatives to those young people, whether that be credit courses toward apprenticeships in grades 10 and 11, whether that be alternative forms of education that perhaps are not necessarily just academically geared for the high school student. Basically, the issue has been ignored.

The issue of technology that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie raises, a very important issue. I know the hon. member is well aware of the issue and well informed, as she's raised it in this House several times as well as in the financial planning committee of the government, but still we see no action by the government that says that we need to look at this, that we need to look at how this is going to be impacted over the next number of years. Perhaps the government is going to reduce the number of school boards or streamline administration and run our whole system by computers. I don't know, but we're certainly not seeing any sort of vision from the government with regard to the use of technology in our school system.

I did want to relate to the members, Mr. Speaker, some innovative methods of technology that are being used in our school systems, especially in the far north – some distance learning opportunities, some sharing of information, sharing of library, sharing of teachers – that are allowing some smaller schools in Fort Vermilion and the Peace River country to retain their small schools in the small communities and not forcing their students to move to larger centres.

In the government's document Meeting the Challenge the government talked about charter schools and contract schools. We've had very little public discussion about charter schools and about contract schools and, frankly, about the concept of magnet schools, that's somewhat related. There is a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety in Alberta right now about charter schools because the government's going ahead with that, and part of that is created because nobody can quite define exactly how these schools will operate. The Minister of Education gives us hints once in a while, but we've not seen draft legislation. We've not seen draft regulations or a draft contract with these charter schools. Depending on how the charter schools operate, it either could be, at one extreme, the death of the public education system as we know it, or at the other extreme it could be the tool that we need to provide innovation within our public education system. We don't know what it's going to be because we don't know how it's going to operate. I've encouraged the Minister of Education and I continue to encourage the minister to lay out similar to what the Premier did in his previous incarnation when he was the Minister of Environmental Protection. He laid out the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the draft regulations and had a broad, public discussion in this province that didn't take forever, that actually produced an Act that got unanimous support from the Members of this Legislative Assembly. If we could see the same kind of thing with regard to the charter schools legislation, we could have some public discussion. Again, a task force on the future of education would allow that kind of public discussion to happen, would allow for interim reports, where you would see different models of charter schools, because depending on where

you look in the States where charter schools have been operating will determine different kinds of models.

Mr. Speaker, nothing in the throne speech, nothing in any of the changes the government has made addresses the real issue facing schools today: schools being asked to do more and more and more noneducational duties that historically have been provided by communities or other kinds of social agencies. This is a major block. We have students who are in the school system who are not adequately receiving other kinds of services, whether it be health, child welfare, or other human services. In addition, we have teachers being asked to act as counselors, being asked to act as watchdogs. In Red Deer this past weekend I had one school principal come to me and say that he was terribly upset at the fact that he now had to act as a watchdog to determine whether a single parent, a young woman in his school, was going to get her social assistance cheque – right or wrong. Frankly, I said: "Well, what do you expect the minister to do? You want the young woman to continue in school, to be responsible, to be attending. Surely to goodness, the school has to have a role in that." I don't blame the minister of child welfare for that move, but the point is that that school is now being asked to take on an additional responsibility.

The Bernd Walter report, which was ignored by this government, suggested that the school be the place where all the services to children be provided. There are pros and cons to that argument, Mr. Speaker. There's some discussion, but this government has not had a public discussion about whether the school in fact, number one, should be the place where all services to children are delivered and, number two, how that should be structured in terms of whose responsibility in the school and which funding. That issue has been totally ignored. Yet whether you go to the school in Spirit River or the school in downtown Edmonton, in my riding, you'll find that one of the major pressing issues is the use of the school and all of the services that are going to children: who's providing those services, who has the responsibility, and who has the responsibility for funding those services. We have generally a dismal record in co-ordinating services to children in this province. One of the vehicles that has worked is the community schools. We see that program axed without any consultation. I didn't see anywhere in all the consultation that that should be axed.

The minister has sponsored one weekend forum, or one two-day forum, on violence in our schools. It's a very pressing issue, and I know some members on the other side of the House as well as on this side are concerned about that issue. I wish I had the easy answer. I wish I knew how to fix that one, because I would stand up here, and I'm sure everybody would agree that that's exactly what we need to do. The reality is that the level of violence in our schools, regardless of how you define that, is increasing. Some of the issues certainly in my riding have been racially affected. There have been suggestions that discrimination or conflict between races are issues. Other times it's been suggested to me that it's a lack of parental authority, a lack of the school being able to move in when violence starts. The issue is that we have a real problem with growing violence in the schools, and we need to address it. It's not just a school issue; it's a societal issue. I'm not suggesting that we're going to cure all of the world's evils, but certainly it is an issue we need to address. [interjection] There's been absolutely no suggestion certainly from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, whom I hear in the background, as to how we can constructively address that issue. Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to let all Albertans, whether they be from education, from the police forces, from the communities, from academia, and from other sectors as well, talk with us in terms of: how do we address

that issue? Again it's not an easy one. I don't expect the government to have all the answers.

I'd like to state for the record here that there have been a few incidences of violence in the schools that have hit the newspapers since this legislative session has opened. I believe that there are things that we can do. I don't believe that those acts of violence are the Minister of Education's responsibility. I don't think he has committed or incited these, and for that reason I've refrained from standing in this House during question period and trying to accuse the Minister of Education of not doing his job in that regard. It's a complex problem. It's not just the Minister of Education's responsibility. It's the responsibility of a lot of people in our society, and we have to work jointly to help solve that. By having a task force on education, we can bring some of those people together and help address that problem.

3:20

We have a big problem of accessibility in this province. We had 10,000 students last year who qualified for programs in postsecondary education who did not gain acceptance because there was not enough room for them. In addition, we have grade 12 returnees coming back for their fourth year. We often hear about this young fellow or young woman going back to play sports for another year or to be in the drama league for another year. I want to credit the association responsible for high school athletics for addressing that problem and limiting to three years the number of years a student can participate in interschool sports. The reality is that a lot of those students are going back because there are no places for them in postsecondary institutions. I believe that we need to have a task force on education to look at these broad issues so that we can co-ordinate, so that we can determine where we need to have more spots in our postsecondary institutions. That may well mean moving resources from A to B; it doesn't necessarily mean all new expenditures.

The government keeps talking about lifelong learning. I know the Minister of Health, when she reads *Hansard*, will know that the further education councils and the advanced education department in this province have had some general discussions about that. She will also know and I'm sure she will agree that this is an evolving discussion that we need to have not just this year, not just 10 years ago. We need to look into the 21st century and determine exactly how as a province we're going to respond to the demand for lifelong learning. Not only are we going to have to look at the major issues that affect education today but the major education issues for the future.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this very important initiative by the Leader of the Official Opposition. It is a way for us to look at the future of education rather than sitting behind closed doors determining what shall happen and then sponsoring quasi task forces of government MLAs to do damage control and out there to sell the program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 202 today. Bill 202 is a duplication of the consultations already carried out by the Department of Education. We have had roundtables throughout '92 and '93, roundtables that have included members of many groups dedicated to the education of our youth of this province, groups such as the ATA, the Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta School Business Officials association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, community organizations, parental groups, the business commu-

ity, labour organizations, school trustees. The list goes on. This government has consulted with hundreds of people through two provincial roundtables and eight regional discussions. As my colleagues outlined before, 31,000 Albertans responded through 1,700 written submissions to the roundtable workbook. The Department of Education continues to receive submissions, and the consultation process continues. This government continues to consult with Albertans with regard to the direction that education will take in the future.

After looking through the report tabled by the minister last Tuesday, Meeting the Challenge, I see to have recognized a few recommendations. The opposition says that we have not consulted Albertans in creating our plan for restructuring education. This report prepared through submissions made by Albertans proved that in fact we have talked with and are still listening to Albertans. The Minister of Education continues to meet with school boards and the ATA and other groups interested in education. This government has only decreased education funding by 12.4 percent, less than any other department. The report shows that Albertans recognized the need to make education more cost-efficient. However, the people of this province and this government realized that a 20 percent reduction could have put a great strain on education. The report showed that the people support the provisions of early childhood services. However, they were concerned that the cost to deliver could be reduced, and I believe it's been addressed in the announcement that the minister made on January 18 of this year.

Albertans agreed with this government that taxation is not the answer to our fiscal problems, as members of the opposition have been heard to say. Taxation will not be used to control spending problems. This government has acted to try to eliminate the problem of fiscal equity in this province. The people of Alberta have told this government that fiscal equity is a major concern that must be dealt with. Mr. Speaker, over the last five years I have met with a number of groups and individuals concerned with equity financing of our school system. Every group is a little bit different, but every group didn't address the problem totally. Presently in this province we could have an equalized assessment of a property owner of \$100,000. The school portion of his taxes in one part of the province could be \$1,800; in another jurisdiction, as low as \$300. That is not fair. It's not fair to the young people of this province, because in many cases the property owner that is paying the high rate is the very school that spends the least dollars per student, and they can't afford to tax any more. The minister's announcement on January 18 addressed that problem. Now we'll have full equity for all students across the province, no matter where they live.

The people of Alberta wanted more input in education at the community level. This government has acted to ensure that parents, teachers, students, community organizations, businesses, and industry will have an input in programs and delivery of services in the education system.

Finally, the people of Alberta expressed concerns regarding the duplication of services in the province. To try to reduce this problem, this government will be reducing the number of school boards in the province. By consolidating services we hope to reduce overlap and duplication. Administration can also be reduced by amalgamating school boards. The separate school boards of this province continue to be an asset to the education system.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has now concluded.

3:30 head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Workers' Compensation Board

502. Moved by Mr. Beniuk:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to improve the Workers' Compensation Board and Workers' Compensation Act by the following initiatives:

- (1) seeking the creation of an all-party standing committee of the Legislative Assembly on the WCB with the following responsibilities:
 - (a) to make appointments to all major positions at the WCB including the president, chief executive officer, chair and the board of the WCB, and chair and the board of the Appeals Commission, said appointments to be selected from a short list submitted by the Public Service Commission following a public search process, and no appointments to be for longer than three years, and
 - (b) to review and set future WCB guidelines and ensure the WCB is fully accountable to the Legislature; and
- (2) reviewing and where necessary amending the Workers' Compensation Act to
 - (a) require the WCB to accept the opinion of an independent three-member medical panel as final in cases where previous medical opinions differed greatly,
 - (b) improve the current system of claims adjudication by including claims precedent, and
 - (c) require copies of all medical reports be provided to claimants with a plain language assessment of their claim and the WCB's reasons for its decision in each case.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. BENIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Motion 502 dealing with the Workers' Compensation Board. The WCB is one of the largest financial entities in our province, with invested assets of \$2 billion. The board arbitrarily determines its own annual income of approximately half a billion dollars and has the authority to collect those funds from employers. The board membership consists of 11 members: the chair, the president and chief executive officer, and nine other board members, three of each appointed to represent the interests of employers, employees, and the general public. Administrative authority is in the hands of the president and chief executive officer, who is granted a great deal of discretionary power over WCB's operations and policies. Accountability towards and input from workers, employers, and the general public was the original rationale for having on the board an equal number of representatives from each of these groups. The WCB was originally established as a form of a social contract between employers and employees with the government facilitating the process. In exchange for workers who were injured at work not suing their employers, the employers agreed to pay into a special fund to cover wages lost and rehabilitation costs of the injured workers. Based on the flood of WCB complaints being received from both rural and urban areas, the WCB is failing in its original mandate. Eighty percent of calls received in some constituency offices are complaints on the WCB. The interests of injured workers, employers, and the general public are not being

adequately served. Both injured workers and their employers are frustrated and disillusioned in their dealings with the WCB.

For the WCB to properly fulfill its mandate, it must be held accountable to and by its stakeholders: the injured workers, the employers, and all Albertans. The WCB Act does not refer to any shareholders. The Act does not state who owns the WCB. Is the WCB a Crown corporation, or is the WCB an entity owned by and operated for the benefit of its stakeholders – the employers who pay yearly insurance fees to the WCB and the injured workers who are to be compensated for loss of income and rehabilitation costs incurred due to injury in the workplace – with the government acting as a facilitator? If the WCB is an entity owned by and operated for the benefit of its stakeholders with the government acting as the facilitator, what mechanism is in place that allows, enables the stakeholders to hold the WCB, especially the president and chief executive officer, accountable to the stakeholders? At present, Mr. Speaker, there is no mechanism.

Compounding the problem is the decision of the contemporary minister responsible for the WCB to distance himself from the operations at the WCB. A great void exists, a black hole. Both injured workers and employers are disillusioned with the WCB. It must be stressed that the WCB Act grants the board carte blanche powers to arbitrarily set at its sole pleasure fees to be paid by employers without being bound to tax in a uniform or fair manner the employers of any industry class or subclass.

The WCB Act grants the board absolute authority to self-regulate and self-determine its yearly income, to charge employers any fees it decides to charge. The board is not even required to justify the fees assessed to employers, not even in our law courts. The board is a law unto itself taxing employers and collecting whatever fees it has self-determined, and the employers are legally bound to pay. Failure to pay may result in the employer's business operations being closed.

How many employers, how many companies have been driven into bankruptcy by the WCB? Any employer who questions, who challenges the fees assessed is restricted by legislation to appeal within the WCB system, first to the Claims Services Review Committee and then to the more autonomous Appeals Commission. No appeals are permitted outside the WCB system; for example, to the law courts. Mr. Speaker, to whom is the WCB accountable and through what mechanism? Certainly not to its stakeholders. Lack of accountability to stakeholders, to injured workers and their employers discredits the WCB and warps the WCB's focus of operations. Motion 502 will make the WCB more accountable to injured workers and their employers through the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, many of the injured workers that the WCB was established to compensate are very unhappy, disillusioned, bitter about their treatment by the WCB. The board fails to listen, is not accountable to them. One major difficulty is the manner and method with which the WCB deals with claims filed by injured workers. The Act gives the WCB too much flexibility of action in deciding cases, leading to contradictions, confusion, and frustration. The board can arbitrarily dispense or refuse to dispense compensation to workers who are injured, resulting in long, drawn-out appeals, denial, or perceived denial of fairness and natural justice.

The Workers Compensation Board prides itself in not being bound by precedent, by its own previous decisions. The board claims to look at each injured worker's case independently, in isolation, totally removed from its previous decisions in other similar cases. Each case stands on its own in isolation. Mr. Speaker, this is the antithesis, the opposite, of how our law courts operate, of how your rulings, your decisions are assisted in being

made in this House. *Beauchesne* provides examples, precedents, of how other similar questions, issues were resolved, dealt with by other Speakers. Judges do not operate in isolation from previous rulings. They embrace previous decisions, precedents, to assist them to be consistent and equitable. WCB decisions on injured worker claims at all levels, from the caseworker to the Claims Services Review Committee to the Appeals Commission level, operate in isolation from previously decided similar injury claims. Without the use of precedent, the established use of fair and equitable guidelines, natural justice is denied or perceived to be denied to the injured worker. This leads to injured workers feeling betrayed by the WCB system. Injured workers focus their thoughts and energies on proving that their injuries should be compensated by seeking evermore medical reports, by commencing appeals within the WCB system, and by phoning their MLAs for help.

Mr. Speaker, there is no justice in a system wherein two workers with similar injuries receive compensation packages that are poles apart, one getting the royal treatment and the other the boot. Rejection of precedent concept is a rejection of natural justice, real or perceived. We as legislators have a responsibility to the injured workers, their employers, all Albertans to correct this situation.

Mr. Speaker, the WCB Act is a poorly crafted, outdated Act that constantly refers throughout to what the WCB may do and not what the WCB must do for injured workers. The term "may" makes the board's responsibility to injured workers optional, at the sole discretion of the board. The WCB Act implies that the board is not mandated, required, to help injured workers, but it may help injured workers if it so decides at its sole discretion. This is not acceptable.

Employers pay insurance fees to the WCB so their workers, when injured, will be looked after and not maybe looked after by the board. For example, I refer to section 83(1) of the WCB Act, which deals with vocational rehabilitation. The Act reads that "the Board shall take whatever measures it considers necessary to assist a worker injured." What the board considers necessary could be totally different than what is required to rehabilitate the injured worker to enable the injured worker to return to the workplace. I remind this House of the classes, which cost the WCB \$3,700 each, that injured workers took at the unlicensed Jack Bredin Community Institute. The WCB considered those classes as necessary. The injured workers objected to the waste of money. Mr. Speaker, no wonder the injured workers and their employers are disillusioned with the operations of the board.

3:40

The problem begins with the wording of the poorly crafted, outdated, ancient WCB Act itself. The board is not accountable to anyone: not to the injured workers, not to the employers, not even to the contemporary minister responsible for the WCB, who has distanced himself from the operations of the board. Mr. Speaker, there has to be a mechanism in place to hold the WCB accountable to its stakeholders.

By now all members of the House are aware of the provisions and the recommendations of the Horowitz report. Decisions of acceptance or rejection of an injured worker's claim are influenced and determined by medical reports submitted by doctors. The WCB has failed to accept and implement the Horowitz report recommendation that an independent three-member medical panel make the final decision in cases where previous medical opinions differed greatly.

At present when medical reports are submitted by doctors, including specialists, that differ in their opinions, the WCB

arbitrarily selects the medical opinion that it prefers, usually the medical report submitted by its own doctor. The result is that injured workers do not accept the WCB's rejection of their injury claim. Appeals are filed. Additional medical opinions are obtained which the WCB appears to ignore to the detriment of the injured worker. Natural justice appears to be denied. Long, drawn-out appeals; demonstrations outside the WCB offices; negative publicity towards the board; case files remaining open for years; anger, emotional stress and frustration on the part of injured workers and their families and probably emotional stress and frustration by WCB employees follows along with appeals for help by injured workers to their MLAs. If the board simply implemented this Horowitz report recommendation, an independent three-member medical panel would come to a final decision on the injury claim assuring a fair and equitable settlement both to the injured worker and the board.

Mr. Speaker, it would certainly help the claims process if injured workers received the required copies of medical reports and if WCB decisions under injury claims were written in plain language, as recommended by the Horowitz report, number 34, and rejected by the board.

The establishment of an all-party standing committee of the Legislature on the WCB would provide a mechanism by which the WCB would be held accountable to the employers and injured workers, with the government acting as the facilitator. All MLAs – urban and rural, from both sides of the House – receive calls for help from their constituents regarding difficulties with the WCB. The establishment of an all-party standing committee of the Legislature will make the WCB more accountable to the Legislature and will enable MLAs to offer suggestions, influence the establishment of future guidelines, helping in the positive future evolution of the WCB to ensure that the WCB properly fulfills its mandate and is accountable to injured workers, employers, all Albertans through the Legislature. The appointment of individuals from a shortlist submitted and screened by the Public Service Commissioner following a public search process will ensure that the best candidates are appointed to the chair and the board of the WCB, including president and chief executive officer, and to the chair and the board of the Appeals Commission, enhancing credibility, accountability, and legitimacy.

The contemporary minister responsible for the WCB has received letters, as have members on this side of the House.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, you're rising on a point of order?

DR. WEST: Yes. I wonder if the member would entertain a question in debate.

MR. BENIUK: Mr. Speaker, my time is running out, and I would like to finish my . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the answer yes or no?

MR. BENIUK: No, absolutely.

Debate Continued

MR. BENIUK: The contemporary minister responsible for the WCB has received letters, as have members on this side of the House, from employees of the Appeals Commission, and he is fully aware of the seriousness of the problems at the Appeals

Commission. An all-party standing committee of the Legislature appointed from a shortlist submitted and screened by the Public Service Commissioner would go a great distance to preventing such problems from further arising. Please remember that we are dealing with an entity possessing invested assets of \$2 billion, an annual income of approximately half a billion dollars, and an unfunded liability of approximately half a billion dollars. WCB decisions impact on all Albertans. As Stan Udaskin of the Financial Executives Institute Canada stated in Saturday's *Edmonton Journal*, I quote: "When you see [an] organization that is half-a-billion dollars in the hole, you have to say, well, what are you [going to do] about it?"

The passage of Motion 502 will send a positive message for change, for sound management, for improved credibility, for accountability: accountability towards the employers that fund the WCB, towards the injured workers that the WCB was originally established to help, towards all Albertans through the Legislature. I ask all members to support Motion 502.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Motion 502 sponsored by the member for Edmonton-Northwoods. He spoke of a black hole, and I'm afraid that is where the member's logic appears to originate from.

Point of Order

Incorrect Reference to a Constituency

MR. BENIUK: A point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order, Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. BENIUK: I just want to bring to your attention that there is no member here from Edmonton-Northwoods. It's Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: All right. Edmonton-Norwood.

Hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, please continue.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I'm sorry; I didn't catch that point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, please continue.

Debate Continued

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I fail to see how this motion would make the Workers' Compensation Board more efficient or more effective. Actually, I fear that the motion would cause the WCB to become a rather ineffective board: a board that could become subject to interference by the government, subject to interference by this Legislature.

The Workers' Compensation Board was created by an Act in 1918. The board operates along five founding principles. One, that employers would pay the costs of job-related injuries in exchange for protection against lawsuits by the injured worker; two, that participation would be compulsory for most industries to promote collective liability; that the WCB would have exclusive jurisdiction; finally, that the Appeals Commission would be independent of the WCB adjudication and that the WCB's administration and adjudication functions would remain independent from government. I think, Mr. Speaker, that's a very important principle, the independence from government, and I become concerned when I hear the direction of Motion 502. This motion is typical of a party and a group that believes in central

control, that government will tell the individual everything of an individual's life.

3:50

The motion has three main principles to deal with: the creation of a standing committee of the Legislature to make appointments to the board, to review and set the WCB's future operating policies, and to amend the Workers' Compensation Act to make the WCB more accountable to external medical doctors. The motion, if passed, would put the appointment of board members into the hands of a standing committee of this Legislature. If the government wished, it could use this appointment process to manipulate the WCB into becoming a tool for the government. That goes against the principle of the WCB. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. [interjections] Please, Mr. Speaker, please. Could we have some order here?

I believe we should allow appointments to be recommended by a committee independent of the government or the Legislature to ensure that workers' and employers' concerns are represented in the best way possible. Developing policy that is representative of all workers and employees is the role of the WCB's board of directors.

Certainly changes need to be made, but this is not the direction. In fact, for a direction I would refer the members opposite to Bill 210, brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-West. If members want to read a good comment and a good direction for the WCB, I would recommend that they read this and vote for it when it comes forward.

The hon. member opposite suggests that appointments to major positions within the WCB be appointed by a standing committee of the Legislature based on a shortlist recommended by the Public Service Commissioner. That's a fair idea given that all boards and agencies use the Public Service Commission and the commissioner to implement board appointments, and I should point out that this is an initiative implemented by this government. I am pleased to see the member's support for our government policy. However, the WCB already has in place an internal appointment review panel, and this works well. As well, this panel was in fact a recommendation of the Auditor General that was acted upon.

I don't see the rationale behind dismantling the appointment review committee and replacing it with a mechanism that would be no more effective and in fact would be more open to interference. It's simply a good attempt at public relations, and that is what is so typical of the members opposite: consumption for public relations. One of the reasons that the board operates well is that by statute it must represent a broad range of Alberta employers and employees. In fact, three directors must represent employers and three must represent the interests of the workers. So the workers are well represented. In addition, three directors are appointed to be representative of the interests of all Albertans. I would suggest to the member opposite that we should be working together to ensure that the best possible cross section of Albertans is represented by the board of directors, not worrying about the mechanism as to how they are put on the board.

The second way the Member for Edmonton-Norwood would like to gain control of the WCB is by allowing his standing committee to review and set future WCB guidelines. He wants to ensure that the WCB is fully accountable to the Legislature. Again the member is trying to use the Legislature to try and control an independent arm's-length corporation.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

I believe we should leave policy formulation to the Workers' Compensation Board where it belongs, with the board members: board members who are independent of this government, board members who are aware of the day-to-day operations of the WCB. These people are the experts, Mr. Speaker or Mr. Deputy Speaker or Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker. They are following the day-to-day operations of their corporation. They are aware of the trends that are developing. They are in the know much more so than the Legislature would be. As a Legislature we are elected representatives who fight for the best results for our constituents. By allowing us to control the policies of the WCB, we are put into conflict. I am more comfortable allowing the WCB to carry out its functions independent of government. We have too much government interference in the lives of business and boards already. If my constituents have concerns that need to be raised with the WCB, I will do so, and I can assure you I will make strong representation. That is my role. But MLAs should not be in the position to change WCB policies because of political pressure.

The final aspect of this motion, Mr. Speaker, is to allow the standing committee to review and recommend the Workers' Compensation Act. I would suggest to the member opposite that if he wishes to change the Workers' Compensation Act, he should sponsor a private member's Bill outlining his amendments. Once again, we have a perfect example from this side, Bill 210, exactly what the private members should be intelligent enough to do on the other side. Private members' hour has become a positive initiative. We have seen one Bill pass into law, and looking through the other Bills that are coming up, I can certainly see a number of others that I hope will pass into law as well.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage every member to vote against 502. The WCB does not receive any funding out of the general revenue fund, so I don't see why we as a Legislature should try and take control of it. Thank you very much.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker. Let me speak in support of Motion 502 as presented by the member and let me say a very well-written and meaningful motion sponsored by Edmonton-Norwood.

Can I call you Mr. Speaker even though you don't officially have that title?

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the motion entails a number of aspects. I think the most important, though, is the establishment of what's referred to as the all-party legislative committee and first of all recognize the reference to "all-party." When we talk in terms of all-party, it's referring to the parties that are represented in this Legislative Assembly, and it's done on that basis to ensure that it reflects the views of Albertans throughout the province and not simply the views of those constituents of government members or what some of the government members may feel are the views of their constituents. In many cases, I believe that what they perceive as the views of Albertans are way, way off track. So when you get that other point of view from opposition parties that are represented in this House, you get that more enlightened, more overall point of view that is not so biased as it may be at the present time.

Now, we talk in terms of an all-party legislative committee, and we talk in terms as to why there is a need for that type of

committee. What's wrong with the present structure? Well, we have a minister that's responsible for the Workers' Compensation Act, the Member for Red Deer-North. We can look back at previous ministers responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board, and by the very nature of the legislation, by the very wording of the legislation, possibly it's not their fault – possibly it's not the minister responsible for workers' compensation that should be faulted in this particular case because the legislation passed by and amended by Members of this Legislative Assembly on the government side makes it very, very clear that the board is independent and that the board sets policy, the board does this, the board does that. In fact, when one makes an inquiry on behalf of an injured worker to the minister, it's very, very consistent that that will simply be referred to the Workers' Compensation Board to take appropriate action because the minister does not have the legislative authority to impose or to become involved in WCB operations.

4:00

I've often wondered, in accordance with the way that the present legislation is written, as to why there is a minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board, bearing in mind the present legislation. Really, what does that minister do in terms of the Workers' Compensation Board? Virtually powerless, spelled out that way for a reason obviously. What the reason is I don't know, but obviously there was some motivation or some philosophy behind going in that particular direction.

So what does it do to injured workers? What does it do to the Workers' Compensation Board in itself? What it does is that at the current time it allows that board, which is administering a great deal of public dollars, to make decisions that are not fully accountable to those people that are paying their multimillion dollar budget. In other words, the recourse is not really there for those that may object to decisions being made with their money and as to how those decisions are being made and what those decisions are. There is no recourse for them. They can't say, "Well, two, three, four years from now, whatever the case may be, we're going to ensure that there are different people in there," because they're not accountable, they're not elected.

Now, if you have a system, of course, of all-party legislative members, normally dominated by government members – in this particular case it's standard procedure, and I guess there is some argument as to why it is that particular way. In any case, if Albertans, who are paying for the operations of the WCB, are not satisfied with the method in which it is operating, they have a recourse. They can dump those particular members come the next election, and they can ensure that a new body of board members are put in, that at least a majority of new board members are put in.

What an all-party legislative committee does in reality is that it places the power where the power should be, in the hands of the elected representatives. It's the elected representatives that are elected to represent Albertans to ensure that their dollars are being spent in a very accountable, very efficient manner. It is what we call accountability.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the all-party legislative committee and when we talk in terms of what it would do, some of the areas it would become involved with – policy-making, ensuring that there are systems in place that are fair to the injured worker – I think it is time, in view of the current economic restructuring that we see taking place not only in Alberta but also in other parts of Canada, other provinces, provincial governments – and I assume by now that the federal government has given very, very clear direction that they're into restructuring. Probably if we would

have had the opportunity in the last hour to be listening to the Minister of Finance, we would have had some indication as to what that restructuring was.

Now, to talk in terms of restructuring areas that government is directly responsible for, such as education, health care, social services, and so on, is one thing, but under the present system it doesn't really allow for a restructuring of the Workers' Compensation Board. There has to be a massive restructuring. Employers have made it very, very clear that the premiums that have been paid and the increases we see in the premiums, particularly from the point of view of small business, hurt them considerably, hurt them dramatically.

What this all-party legislative committee has to do is get back to the basics of what the Workers' Compensation Board is all about, what the purpose of the Workers' Compensation Board was. This has been recommended by previous committees that have been established, and it's been overlooked; that is, changing that whole concept of workers' compensation pension benefits to income replacement, loss of income, not necessarily a pension.

Mr. Speaker, when government undertakes something that is so significant, so drastic as to change the concept of, let's say, workers' compensation pensions, you pretty well have to grandfather what's there at the present time. Otherwise, you have outcry from people that are affected, people that have been part of the process, people that have been recipients of workers' compensation for years, saying, "Well, when we applied, when we went on, the rules were a certain fashion. So to change them to affect me, from the workers' point of view, would be very unfair." If new rules are put into place and the injured workers, general employees, employers realize what WCB is all about, what its mandate is, then they're going to say: "Okay, that's fair. We understand."

Some Members of this Legislative Assembly will be more familiar than others as to how it operates, but at the present time you have a system in place, you have a board in place that makes a determination as to the degree of a person's disability, if it's a permanent disability, and that person is pensioned off, pensioned off to as high as 90 percent of pensionable earnings. At the same time, the board has an obligation – and I believe that the obligation I'm going to refer to is more important than monetary compensation – and that is to assist that person to get back into the mainstream of society, become a productive member of society so that person is making a direct contribution.

What happens, Mr. Speaker, is that you have this system in place that at one time simply used to pay out benefits, basically, going from that type of system to a system that spent a great deal of money, and rightfully so, in re-educating that person, retooling that person so they could still play a very meaningful role within society, in fact in a lot of cases much more meaningful than prior to the person's injury or accident. At the same time, after all those dollars have been spent on retooling or re-educating that particular individual, the benefits will continue. So you have what I call the stacking situation, where you have a basic pension, you have dollars that are spent to allow that person to become part of the mainstream of society, and then you have the benefit of having those benefits continue on an income tax free basis. It's a good system for those that are receiving pensions; there's no question about it. It does give that protection no matter what.

From the other side of the coin, we have to look in terms of the cost to fund that type of system. In no other program that is administered by government, whether it be UIC or be this or that, do you have a continuation of those types of benefits when other income is coming in. For example, on the AISH program, the assured income for the severely handicapped, a person gets a base guaranteed income of \$810 a month, is allowed to make a few

dollars extra before it affects that person's monthly income, but after it gets to a little amount, then it starts being deducted dollar for dollar. We can look at unemployment insurance. It's the same concept, where 25 percent of benefits are allowed to be made in addition to those UIC direct benefits, but then from there it starts to decrease.

Workers' compensation pensions, Mr. Speaker, don't, and that can be a horrendous burden to employers because the employees don't pay at the present time. That's a major restructuring of the WCB concept that I believe an all-party legislative committee would have to look at. I caution my remarks, bearing in mind a grandfathering clause, because I know there are a lot of injured workers that would shudder if they heard what I was saying and they felt it was going to affect them directly at this time.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that injured workers out there are desperately crying for is a system that they see to be totally fair, equitable, so that they're all treated in a just matter. No matter how many times the minister of workers' compensation and previous ministers may have stood up in the House and said, "But there is an independent Appeals Commission," that is not satisfying the injured worker out there who feels he or she has a grievance that has not been resolved.

The fundamental reason for that, I believe, is that the WCB legislation, the Workers' Compensation Act, does not allow the ultimate appeal that virtually every member within society has, and that is an appeal to the courts. Because an injured worker is denied that appeal, the ultimate appeal of the court system, the injured worker right off the bat can feel, "Well, I'm not getting the same type of treatment, the same degree of justice that another member of society may have if it's a grievance in some area other than workers' compensation." So this all-party committee and this motion does in fact support the establishment of a medical panel, an independent medical panel of three doctors to arbitrate or make rulings on the medical implications.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

There are other factors, in addition to medical implications, where injured workers feel they have not been treated fairly. I've heard the argument many times as to how the Appeals Commission is headquartered in a different building and how it's totally separate; nevertheless, there is a perception there that they are directly tied, and perception is reality in government. Perception is reality when it comes to politics.

4:10

The injured worker, I believe, and employees and, I feel, employers would participate in a very, very meaningful fashion if an all-party legislative committee, for example, were to say, "We're going to set up a public participation process, a hearing process, because we want new ideas, we want new thoughts, we want a new way of doing things," and make it quite clear that there is going to be a total restructuring of the Workers' Compensation Board, that it wasn't just going to be a little bit of dressing here, a little bit of dressing there. I would think you would have an eagerness out there like you've never had before, particularly amongst injured workers and employers, who really would want to become part of that review, to shake up the board totally, if they felt right off the bat that it was going to be meaningful and that it wasn't going to be a question of a number of recommendations coming forward in some report that is just filed, tabled, and most of those recommendations are not acted upon.

At the present time the Workers' Compensation Board can set up a public participation process, but then that is referred to the

Legislative Assembly for appropriate legislative change. If the Legislative Assembly chooses to ignore those recommendations, which it has been done in many, many cases, nothing becomes of it. If it's an all-party legislative committee, very much like Private Bills for example, where the recommendations that do come forward from that committee to this Legislative Assembly – it's almost a given they're going to be approved, because there is a respect from Members of this Legislative Assembly for its own members who may constitute a committee or another form. It would not simply be shelved under the table, because you're sitting across from those committee members on a daily basis and you can be haunted by the fact that they've made recommendations that you've chosen to ignore.

Now, our good Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark I know would like the opportunity to speak on this, so at this particular point I'm going to cut it short. But I would really sincerely ask, as a person very familiar with the Workers' Compensation Board, for all members of this House – for all members of this House – to wholeheartedly endorse this particular motion, possibly with the exception of the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, because he's made his opinion very clear. So on that note, I'll conclude.

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

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to join my colleague for Cypress-Medicine Hat in speaking against this motion. I am sure the hon. member does have true concerns with which the way the Workers' Compensation Board operates. I have been on both sides of the WCB as well, and having come out to the penny on one of my audits – thank you – I see that it is truly funded by workers, by employers. It was only when it reached this unfunded liability position of staggering proportions that we began to take this active interest.

The tragedy of having people injured on the job is a tough one, and for us to go in and try to legislate fairness or try to determine who's at fault and what compensation should be and shouldn't be is a very difficult process. I'm quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, just thankful that the WCB exists for both worker fairness and for employer fairness as well.

I have a little problem with the way the motion is brought forward. It's a mechanism used to change policy. I'm sure the member opposite appreciates that the motion is purely a shortcut and not reflecting due process for change. The member proposes that we create a standing committee to set policy for the WCB, including future WCB guidelines and even appointments of the president, board of directors, and the chair of the Appeals Commission. It's a tremendous amount of control to give this Assembly, especially when you consider the fact that the WCB is in fact an arm's-length corporation and has been since its inception. It operates independent of government influence. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, it is self-funding. It draws no money from the general revenue fund. All of its operations are funded through the assessment it collects, plus revenue generated through investments. No tax dollars go to the WCB. I think to intertwine it with this noble House would in fact maybe just start that little bit of leakage, where money would start to flow through there and really destroy the concept of a self-funded insuring agency.

Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the WCB is not funded by the taxpayer, I'm wondering why the member opposite feels that it should be accountable to this Legislature to the point that we take control of its operations. It's an uncomfortable management style. In fact, previous governments of many party stripes have instituted this interference in free market forces. Until there's a more efficient mechanism, other than competition in the free market, I

would certainly be voting against further government encroachment in semiregulated operations.

I would question the use of the standing committee, Mr. Speaker, for making these changes. We have presently seven standing committees of this Assembly, with MLAs appointed to them at the beginning of each session. Five of these standing committees relate to the function and management of the Assembly: Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Private Bills; Law and Regulations; Public Affairs; and Legislative Offices. As a matter of fact, my colleague immediately adjacent to me is a chair of one of these privileged committees.

DR. L. TAYLOR: On your left.

MR. SMITH: On my left.

The remaining two standing committees, the Public Accounts Committee and the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act Committee, have been set up to ensure that members from all parties in this Assembly have the opportunity to scrutinize the cabinet ministers' expenditures and question the management of the heritage savings trust fund. These two committees are directly concerned with the management of taxpayer dollars, Mr. Speaker, and therefore should bear the scrutiny of an all-party standing committee.

With my limited parliamentary experience, although I have the expertise of many in the front aisles, I'm finding it difficult to find where a precedent exists that can create a standing committee to appoint people to an arm's-length corporation. No standing committee recommends appointments, Mr. Speaker. Where is the precedent to have a standing committee of this Assembly govern the affairs of an arm's-length corporation? Again, you know, the *Titanic* sailed on its own, and it didn't have a committee that was out there arranging the deck chairs. To take a well-managed and well-orchestrated arm's-length operation like WCB and even remotely refer to it as close to the *Titanic* would scare me again in trying to support this motion.

Again, taxpayers' dollars are not used for the funding of the Workers' Compensation Board. It is funded by the employers participating in the plan. Not one dime comes out of the general revenue fund to contribute either to administration or compensation assessed by the Workers' Compensation Board.

4:20

I feel the use of a standing committee to review a specific government entity, especially an arm's-length, independent one like the WCB, which in fact reflects more and more the plans of this government and the ability for the private sector and for nongovernment organizations to efficiently administer in a deregulated environment – so it's the direction we're taking, Mr. Speaker, and it is certainly early in this administration to support taking a step backwards. However, the party opposite does have the great history of being able to accurately predict the past, so it's no surprise.

If the hon. member wishes to have the government create an all-party committee to study the mandate of the WCB, then he should say so. If the member wants to have proposals considered by the WCB or the Minister of Labour, who is responsible for the WCB, then we would expect him to bring them forward. I'm confident that our Minister of Labour, who unfortunately, due to I believe a funeral, is not in position, would really enjoy the true flavour of this debate and the understanding of where we're going from a government side that's well supported by the government side but not, certainly, from the party opposite.

I have to wonder again, Mr. Speaker, why the member would want to appoint a board of directors to the WCB at all. If we

implement his proposal as outlined in Motion 502, there will be no need to have a board of directors. The board of the WCB is responsible, through an Act of this Legislature, for determining the board's compensation policy, reviewing and approving programs and operating policies, and the approval of operating and capital budgets. The board also has the power to enact bylaws and pass resolutions for the conduct of the business and affairs of this board. The responsibility comes from section 3(1) of the Workers' Compensation Act. Perhaps the hon. member would consider amending the Workers' Compensation Act so that this Assembly, through the standing committee, can appoint nine MLAs from both sides of the House to sit as the WCB's board of directors. That in effect is what the motion would or could do. There would be no need to have a board of directors if we pass this motion. It would be a dangerous precedent to pass this motion, but who knows what we'll see next? Perhaps next session we'll see a motion to set up a committee that will see this Legislature control the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, created last session.

That type of management is not what this government is about. Arm's-length corporations are created so the government does not have to be involved in day-to-day operations. We steer; they row. We want to ensure that these organizations function to best serve the people they represent. The Workers' Compensation Board was founded on a principle that it would be independent of the operations of the government. It does not draw nor contribute to the general revenue fund, so it may remain independent. Independence is critical, Mr. Speaker. Let's preserve the mandate of the WCB: to provide compensation fairly for workers who suffer job-related injuries and to protect employers from legal action over these injuries.

The administration and adjudication functions of the WCB are independent of the government to eliminate political interference. We, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, have to continue on this bent. As we move towards open and more transparent government, certainly the WCB would represent more of a flagship of proficiency than a need for improvement and perpetual motions. The board represents workers, employers, and the general public. There are no political appointments to the WCB, and to keep the WCB as effective as possible, the Appeals Commission within the WCB is also an entity separate from claims and assessment functions. Again, no political pressure or interference from this Assembly. However, should we support this motion, we could be in a different scenario down the road.

The minister may ask the WCB to take another look at a specific case but cannot recommend a decision. Of course, we all share and have shared the wisdom of the Minister of Labour, and he certainly has my confidence in being able to ask for another look on a specific case. That, Mr. Speaker, is how indeed the WCB should operate: as a servant of the workers and employers of this province. The employers pay into the WCB . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair regrets to have to interrupt the hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(4) the Chair is required to put all questions to conclude debate.

Therefore, on Motion 502, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, all those members in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion fails.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abdurahman	Hanson	Sapers
Beniuk	Hewes	Soetaert.
Carlson	Kirkland	Taylor, N.
Chadi	Langevin	Vasseur
Collingwood	Leibovici	White
Dalla-Longa	Massey	Wickman
Decore	Nicol	Yankowsky
Dickson	Percy	Zwozdesky
Germain		

Against the motion:

Ady	Haley	Oberg
Amery	Havelock	Paszkowski
Black	Herard	Pham
Burgener	Hierath	Renner
Calahasen	Hlady	Rostad
Cardinal	Jacques	Severtson
Clegg	Jonson	Smith
Coutts	Kowalski	Stelmach
Dinning	Laing	Tannas
Dunford	Lund	Taylor, L.
Evans	Magnus	Thurber
Fischer	McClellan	West
Forsyth	McFarland	Woloshyn
Friedel	Mirosh	

Totals: For – 25 Against – 41

[Motion lost]

4:40 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 17: Mr. Pham]

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

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Speech from the Throne reconfirms the government direction. We are committed to balancing the budget, creating the climate for jobs, improving

and streamlining government, listening to Albertans. A challenging time is ahead of us, and many difficult decisions have to be made. We as the government have to meet these challenges head on. We cannot buy the easy way out.

Talking about the easy way out, I am shocked to find out that the Leader of the Opposition at a recent meeting with U of C students, when being asked how he's going to deal with our financial problems, suggested (a) I'll increase personal income tax, (b) implement a sales tax. Mr. Speaker, all I have to say to that is that I'm glad we are the government and not them.

Now I would like to speak about the amendment. This amendment can only be passed if 10 government members actually vote along with the Liberal members to bring down their own government. It is very difficult to believe. It is just like giving a guy a stick and asking him to beat himself on the head. It is why some of my colleagues think it is just another attempt of the Liberals to stall and waste the valuable time of this House.

I, personally, would like to give the Leader of the Opposition the benefit of the doubt, because more than anyone he should know that it is expensive to conduct business in this House. It is totally irresponsible for him or any member to deliberately try to waste our time. I would like to think that the Leader of the Opposition sincerely believes that his amendment can be passed in this House; i.e., he sincerely believes that he can get 10 government members to vote against their own government.

I had a very hard time to figure out why the Leader of the Opposition can believe in such a thing until someone pointed out to me what happened at the recent Liberal convention held in Calgary. At that convention, despite every effort from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, he only got a 68 percent vote of confidence. That means that one in every three Liberal members actually cast their vote against their leader. This means that if the Liberal caucus truly reflects the grassroots Liberals, then 10 of the 32 Liberal members may at any point of time disagree with their leader. It is probably why the Leader of the Opposition hopes that he can gather 10 votes from the government caucus.

Unfortunately for him and fortunately for Albertans, our leader, our Premier, has 100 percent support of our caucus. We are all committed to fulfill our mandate and are proud to be members of this government. At this point I would like to ask the Leader of the Opposition to stand up in this House and do the right and honourable thing: to withdraw this silly amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that I have about one minute left. I would like to also talk a little bit about the offer from another hon. member directly to me, to ask if I want to answer his question.

MR. SPEAKER: I regret that the hon. member's time has expired. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak in support of the amendment to the throne speech.

The Speech from the Throne was once again an attempt by this Premier to deliver a warm and fuzzy cover-up, a deliberate smoke screen meant to deflect attention away from the massive damage he is causing this province. In this speech the Premier and this government state that the only reason they are taking the steps they are is to build a brighter future for Albertans. I ask the Premier how you can build a brighter future when every step taken to date is an aggressive move to dismantle the basic foundation of this province and reduce it to rubble. I ask the Premier how you can build a brighter future when you take away hope and opportunity from people and replace it with fear and despair. I ask the

Premier how he can just baldly take credit for creating 35,400 jobs when the reality for Albertans is a real loss of nearly 29,000 jobs.

This job loss has been documented by Statistics Canada and is unrefutable evidence. In fact, if I remember correctly, the 110,000 jobs was a campaign promise from the Premier, and that promise was made in May. The stats he's quoting started in January and go from a January year-end to a December year-end. If you quote the stats from May, when he made the promise, in fact we lost 28,900 jobs. Now, that Premier keeps telling us that that was then and this is now. Well, that job loss is now. Those 29,000 jobs have been lost now, not then, and it's his fault, not anybody else's.

In this speech the Premier promised to continue to put people first. Well, definitely I must have blinked when that happened. Of course, I make the assumption that when he said that, he really meant: put Albertans first. I see no evidence that this has happened even once. Dismantling the health care and education systems undermines every person in this province and certainly does not put their needs first. It is an overt attempt to undermine our basic Canadian identity, Mr. Speaker, an identity, I would like to remind the Premier, that is based on preserving traditional values, which was talked about in the throne speech, which every generation of Albertans has worked hard to establish and maintain, often at great personal cost. It's an absolute insult to all of us that this Premier would promise on page 1 of the throne speech to "stay true to [Albertans'] traditional values," when it is the last promise he intends to keep. In fact, he has made every effort to date to destroy those values dear to the heart of every Albertan.

Maybe what the Premier really means when he says to put people first is to put good Tories first. There is no doubt that we saw ample evidence of that last session with appointments à la Oldring and cookies and pork loan guarantees. In fact, just this month the Economic Development and Tourism minister confirmed that Oldring, a former Tory cabinet minister, had his six-month \$50,000 contract renewed February 1. So perhaps what the Premier means is that he's really promising Albertans in their future just more of the same.

We see a definite move towards patronage Tory style when the Premier takes away the right to vote from Albertans. Government-appointed hospital boards are definitely a power grab; they are a government power grab. Democratic rights are destroyed when a government grabs power and control. This is maintaining traditional values all right, Mr. Premier, but it's maintaining traditional values Stalin style.

Mr. Speaker, is this what the Premier had in mind when he made all those promises to Albertans? We hear these platitudes and promises, but what we get is a government whose plan hinges on the latest popularity polls.

{Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair}

Let's just see how this works. At the request of staff from the Grey Nuns hospital, we, the MLAs from Edmonton-Avonmore, Edmonton-Mill Woods, and Edmonton-Ellerslie, were asked to react to rumours.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

DR. L. TAYLOR: A point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is rising on a point of order. You have a quotation for me, please?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Standing Order 23(i) and *Beauchesne* 484(3). We'd like to check both of them.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, Cypress-Medicine Hat is cognizant of the fact that the last time he had a point of order, I stalled him until I could verify that in fact it was legitimate. He has learned his lesson well, and his point is now to be made.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. Imputing motives, suggesting that we are appointing various Tories and not going through the appropriate Public Service Commission.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, if I could respond.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sorry. We were in the process of changing from the Speaker to the Deputy Speaker, but I certainly didn't hear that as an imputed motive. Perhaps the hon. member who is speaking could verify that.

MS CARLSON: I made one particular statement of fact, and that was with regard to John Oldring.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: As I was stating, the MLAs from southeast Edmonton were asked to react to rumours that the Grey Nuns hospital is closing. Why do we have to react to rumours? Why are we not given facts, something concrete to work with, a plan which we could evaluate on the basis of merit and consequences, a plan which takes into account the costs and benefits and options of a particular course of action? Because this government, this Premier does not operate on the basis of facts or on the basis of plans determined before the popularity poll is taken. This Premier does not decide our future by planning, evaluating, and choosing the best course of action for all Albertans. Instead, this Premier decides our future by picking targets. Then he sends out the rumours and waits and watches for the fallout. If he gets enough flack, if his popularity falls, he changes course. Where's the credibility in governing this way? Can anybody justify this as a responsible way to run a province?

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is rising on a point of order.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I must really protest, under Standing Order 23(i) and *Beauchesne* 484, imputing motives once again.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Perhaps hon. members would realize that unavowed motives – it doesn't have to be an adverse or an improper motive. Just an unavowed motive can set off the nerves of those who are listening to your speech. So if you could proceed through to the meat of your speech without the characterizations that are unavowed.

MS CARLSON: Certainly I will, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: I would just like to point out that some of my information came from a letter from the Minister of Health to the administrators of the Edmonton and Calgary hospitals, where in point of fact she said at one point,

I also want to clarify my firm belief that major restructuring of acute care services is necessary in both cities in order to meet the new financial targets.

Based on that and other information supplied to the Grey Nuns hospital, they impugn that there's a great possibility that the new target will be the Grey Nuns hospital.

Now, the Grey Nuns hospital is a hospital that saw well in excess of 70,000 people last year. We are talking about a hospital that is second in this province in volume only to the Royal Alex, which saw more than 80,000 people. But this hospital will close regardless of need, regardless of its outstanding record, regardless of its remarkable contribution to the medical community as a world-class teaching facility, regardless of it being a building block in the foundation of health care in this province, unless we can send this Premier a loud and clear message, a message not only that it cannot close because this hospital provides an essential service and jobs to Mill Woods' residents, but it also provides an essential service to people throughout Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Beaumont, and all the towns throughout northern and central Alberta, and also that closing this hospital will cause an outcry in this province that has never been heard before.

In fact, to date we have 15,000 signatures on a petition. They'll send a message which clearly tells this Premier and this government that there are more than 70,000 direct users of this hospital and their family and friends who use this facility each and every year, who will make their voices heard on this issue. In actual fact, something for the government to remember: 50 percent – that's 50 percent – of the people who use this hospital come from outside the direct urban area. That means that more than 35,000 people from rural Alberta use this hospital when they need acute care.

When the Mill Woods' MLAs were asked to do something to respond to the closing of this hospital, we held a forum on Wednesday, February 9, 1994, which was organized with less than one week's notice and attracted more than 300 concerned citizens. Throughout the evening we heard testimony after testimony praising the compassion, the dedication, and the abilities of the Grey Nuns hospital and its staff.

Dr. Michael Lee, an internal medicine specialist, had many heartfelt comments that evening. He talked about getting his education here at the University of Alberta, completing his internship at the General hospital, and then going away to the States to get his specialty training. While in the States he married and started raising his family, yet his heart remained here in Edmonton, with the fellowship of his colleagues, with their dedication to patient care uppermost in his heart and in his mind. So he packed up his young family and moved back. He talked about walking the halls of the Grey Nuns, a brand-new building at the time, and he talked about the experience he felt in the hallways, the patient rooms, the OR, the intensive care, and the emergency units. You see, when the active care portion of the General hospital was closed down, all those doctors and those decades of experience moved to the Grey Nuns. While it was a new hospital, it retained all of the benefits of the combined years of experience that all of the staff had to offer. He talked about how it would be an absolute tragedy if the province allowed a facility of this class to close. His comments were reinforced by a woman from the community who said, "This can just slide right by us if we sleep through it and don't stand up and speak against the closure."

Point of Order Relevance

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

DR. WEST: Yes. *Beauchesne* 459, on relevancy. I know that the throne speech gives the broadest of definition to relevancy, but we're speaking to an amendment, and what I've heard here recently is total discussion on a hypothetical situation based on a letter from the minister. What I'm saying here is that her whole speech is a hypothetical situation that doesn't exist and has no basis or no relevance to this discussion.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Mayfield, do you wish to speak to the point of order as opposed to debate on the point of order?

MR. WHITE: Yes, speaking to this point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Surely the member opposite was awake moments ago when his own member was speaking of something at a Liberal convention and votes. I mean, that is relevant? Surely you have to ask the Speaker to balance these things. The broadest of all debates in this House is the debate on the throne speech, the major intent. If hospitals, admittedly, are the most expensive item on a budget and this government is in the business of dispensing funds, certainly it should be in order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

MR. ADY: On the point of order . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think we've heard from the two sides, hon. minister. Thank you, anyway.

The relevance of conferences outside this Chamber is only in the eyes of the people who may wish to consider them. We have before us a point of order on relevance in debate on the Speech from the Throne and, in particular, on the amendment. The Chair has ruled in a rather broad fashion that the issues of relevancy are widely interpreted on this particular issue. Even though hon. members may feel that a speaker on either side of the House strays a bit from the amendment and from the Speech from the Throne, nevertheless the Chair has allowed the speech to continue. I see no reason, having heard and listened to the cogent arguments on both sides, why that should change at this time. I am sure that the hon. member will address the amendment from time to time in her speech, so I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to continue.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again speaking to the amendment and talking about the Premier's inability to continue to put people first, a chronically ill woman from the community reinforced her need for this facility. She said that closing a hospital like the Grey Nuns, which served a large population, was insanity when this happens in our community just to make the Premier look good. The vice-chairman of the Mill Woods Community League President's Council said that the community would not idly stand by and watch the future of the hospital be decided. So what to do? The question is: if we need to cut health care costs and we don't close this hospital, what is our option? Our option is not the one this Premier has given us. He has told us to make a choice, the Misericordia or the Grey Nuns. We can't close the this for the same reasons we can't close the Grey Nuns. They both provide . . .

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

MRS. McCLELLAN: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, I have to rise on Standing Order 23, probably (i). There has been no decision or recommendation from this government, from this minister, or from the Premier on closure of any hospital in Calgary or Edmonton, in particular the Misericordia or the Grey Nuns. To have that suggested in this House I think is entirely wrong, and I would like to have that withdrawn, unless that member can show some place that this minister or the Premier has suggested that that will happen.

5:00

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, would you like to reply to that point of order?

MS CARLSON: Yes, I certainly would. I'm directly reflecting constituents' concerns in my community, and I thought that the throne speech was a direct venue for me to be able to do that.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I think there is a distinction here. If you are saying that a minister or the Premier has certain intentions or directives that an hon. member has said is not the case, then we have a clear conflict. We also have rules that when an hon. member says within their ambit of experience and activity that something is so, then we have a problem. [interjections] I hear orders of withdraw. I think maybe what we need is clarification. If there's a misunderstanding of what you're saying, that's one thing. Withdraw is quite another. Clarification, I think, may be . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, is the minister prepared to assure this House that the Grey Nuns will not close? Let's hear it.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, we're not debating what may happen in the future. We're debating what has existed up to this period of time, and I think that was the hon. minister's objection, that there was a characterization that dealt with in the recent past. What may happen in the future is open for debate and discussion, but I don't think the point of order is properly open for debate and discussion.

MS CARLSON: If my comments have been misinterpreted, I apologize, but I still believe this is a venue to reflect the concerns of those people in my riding, and their concerns are that they have a very valuable hospital in the riding. What I was doing was expressing many of the very good reasons that they'd qualify that as a needed and necessary hospital.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I have no objection to that, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member will contain herself to that rather than suggesting that a decision or a recommendation has been made by this government.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay; I think we've got it clarified now. Is that right Edmonton-Ellerslie? If you'd continue, then, with your discussions.

MS CARLSON: Well, perhaps if I can continue, the point will be cleared up. May I continue? I'm sure the point will be cleared up.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: One of the real issues here is eliminating inequities faced by urban hospitals. Urban hospitals, who provide all of the care for urban centres and 50 percent of the care for rural centres, are being discriminated against by this Premier, the Premier who promises that he cares and listens.

Let's spend a moment comparing the Grey Nuns with the hospitals in our Health minister's constituency, the Member for Chinook. Our Health minister lives in the constituency called Chinook, which has a population of 15,815 people. She has six hospitals in her constituency.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MS CARLSON: Six.

The Grey Nuns directly services four constituencies and has an immediate population of a hundred thousand people.

In her area the Coronation hospital had a 33 percent occupancy last year; Castor hospital, 34 percent; Oyen hospital, 34 percent; Hanna hospital, 31 percent; Cereal hospital, 29 percent; Consort hospital, 26 percent occupancy. On the other hand, the Grey Nuns had full capacity last year, where waiting lists for many procedures are a fact of life.

How many of the people in our Health minister's constituency had surgery done in those hospitals? Does Coronation do organ transplants? Does Cereal do open-heart surgery? Does Castor have an intensive care unit? No. All these cases are medevacked to urban centres like the Grey Nuns or are scheduled directly at the Grey Nuns.

Our Health minister's constituency has 10.8 hospital beds available for every thousand people. Both Calgary and Edmonton are being driven to aim for 2.43 beds available for every thousand people.

Who supports and promotes this inequity and this unfair treatment? The real Premier, not the TV Premier who promised all of us that he cares and he listens.

We're talking about zero reduction in beds in the health . . .

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry. We appear to have another point of order.

MRS. BLACK: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I really must stand on a point of order under 23(i), imputes, I say, false or unavowed motives of a member of the Crown in this Legislature. I really must insist that the hon. member withdraw those comments. I must insist. [interjections]

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

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, a much more relevant citation . . . [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: If we're going to have points of order, we must listen to the point of order and to the comments on it, so let's not try and drown them out. As you know, the Chair has difficulty hearing, and when he hears too many things, he doesn't hear anything.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I don't need to remind you that you've already ruled on that kind of an interjec-

tion more than once. A more relevant citation under the Standing Orders would be 23(c), where it says, "Persists in needless repetition or raises matters which have been decided during the current session." It is a useless waste of our time for that to be raised again. I certainly hope that you will let the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie continue with the throne speech and advise the members opposite that they should sit and listen and be patient.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I don't think it's fair to characterize the point of order when someone is dealing with characterizations of members of this House as useless repetition. It may be annoying, but it still is perfectly within the purview of any member who feels that another member of this House is in some way being characterized by unavowed motives or by false motives to rise on a point of order and address that.

Edmonton-Ellerslie, are you able to continue without treading on those sensitive toes?

MS CARLSON: Perhaps with your permission, then, I'll leave the hospital issue, and we can all re-evaluate this afternoon's performance when *Hansard* comes out later.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: I'd now like to talk about jobs. The Premier has now started to qualify his unattainable job promise of 110,000 jobs by earlier stating in this House that he had only committed to create the climate for jobs, not the jobs themselves. Well, Mr. Speaker, I ask the people of this province if this is what they believed the Premier promised. Did he really promise to create 110,000 jobs or not? I believe in his campaign commitment that's what he promised. Does this mean that the Premier is now trying to back down out of this promise because he knows that it's an unachievable goal? In fact, last week in the House he said: maybe I should snap my fingers and say, God, create some jobs. Well, perhaps divine help is the only way he's going to achieve that goal.

It is impossible to achieve, because this government has set its course on a course of destruction. Economic growth and therefore job growth result from consumer and business confidence in the marketplace. Confidence does not result when the government of the day sets out to dismantle the province. Confidence does not result when the government of the day is directly responsible for nearly 29,000 jobs lost.

I urge the Premier at this time to listen to the responses he is getting from the people of this province on his toll-free call-in line. The opposition to the manner in which he has set out on this course of destruction is growing daily. Mr. Speaker, I urge the Premier to stop scaring and to start caring like he promised us. More than 40 percent of the people in this province live in fear of losing their jobs. Not only does that make it impossible to create consumer confidence, but it creates a climate of uneasiness in business confidence as well, both locally and globally.

So who is the Premier kidding here? He never intended to create jobs. This is just one more example of a government who refuses to be truthful and up front with the people of this province.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-East.

5:10

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join this debate on the amendment to the Speech from the Throne. I must say that I will be voting against this silly amendment.

Listening to this debate, I can't help but wonder why the Liberals are acting in this fashion, and I mean by opposing the

good, the bad, and the ugly. Over the last seven months, Mr. Speaker, of being here, I have not seen or heard a constructive idea or thought coming from that side of the House with of course the exception of the members for Lesser Slave Lake, Little Bow, Rocky Mountain House, and Calgary-North Hill.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, Edmonton-Norwood has a point of order.

MR. BENIUK: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23. I would like to point out that the member opposite made a statement, the implication of which is very derogatory to this side of the House.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's the truth. The truth can't be derogatory.

MR. BENIUK: Mr. Speaker, can I assume that once again the barking dogs have been unleashed?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sorry. I thought I heard you say Standing Order 103.

MR. BENIUK: No. Standing Order 23.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Standing Order 23 has a whole bunch of characters in there. Which one?

MR. BENIUK: Do I stand or do I wait until you sit?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Go ahead.

MR. BENIUK: Thank you. Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), the very famous three. The member who stood up a few minutes ago and started his speech on the amendment to the throne stated something that was totally, totally derogatory to this side of the House. I would request, Mr. Speaker, that you look at the Blues, and after you look at the Blues, you make your ruling.

Thank you.

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

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, on the purported point of order that came, I listened intently to the hon. member, and I believe he only spoke the truth, that there hasn't been an intelligent idea.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair would observe that there are a number of unhelpful comments to recent debate being made today as to untruthfulness of certain members of the Crown or in the case of the speaker from Calgary-East silliness and that kind of thing. Those are really, when you analyze them, rather unparliamentary and not given to reasonable and orderly debate. So I would admonish members on both sides of the House not to characterize each other with, again, unavowed motives or demeaning kinds of descriptors. If we could have just reasoned debate, I think that would be helpful, but descriptors that reflect unflatteringly upon members opposite one another are not reasonable and are not helpful.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Edmonton elected the hon. members . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Norwood, you asked me to make comment after I see the Blues. The Blues will not be here for 10, 15 minutes or perhaps a longer period of time. But I think I touched in my comments to both sides of the House the kind of point that you were making in here and in some ways we made in the last speaker's speech. Is that not satisfactory?

**Point of Order
Parliamentary Language**

MR. BENIUK: Can I rise? Thank you. On another point of order under the same citation, Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j)» does the Speaker approve as parliamentary the continuous comments being made by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order.

MR. AMERY: You're wasting my time.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: No. Your time is stopped, so we're wasting our collective time but not your time as a speech.

During the course of the debate the Chair, whomever may be occupying it at the time, calls out, "Order." In a parliamentary institution there's a certain amount of give and take – and I'm sure that your member, the hon. Member for Redwater, will be able to tell you about it – that kind of adds to the debate and to the cut and thrust of parliamentary discussion and deliberation. Repeated heckles after a while really don't serve anything except to drown out the speaker who may be addressing something that they feel is very important. So from time to time we call "Order." If order is not brought, then we'll stand up.

The fact that I cannot hear the individual is a problem. When I do hear people making repeated, loud remarks I try and interrupt them. I think we'll leave it at that. I think that after a while we get to disrupting the whole process if we want to have point of order after point of order after point of order.

MR. BENIUK: Mr. Speaker, there must be a misunderstanding. When I rose on this point of order, I was not referring to heckling as heckling. I was referring to derogatory comments being made from that member continuously onto this side of the House. It is not heckling. It is specific words, and if you want, I could start reciting them.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. We have a general convention that words are uttered in this House when they're recorded in *Hansard* or clearly heard by all. If we cannot hear these words that appear to offend you, they will be picked up by *Hansard*. If they're there, then you have a point to be made, but if they're only heard by apparently you, then that's another issue. The Chair cannot be responsible for utterances off the record. That we can't do. If it's clearly picked up, then something can be done. So I think your earlier point of order dealing with checking the Blues might be appropriate.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, if I may make an appeal to both sides of the House. I don't know; I've been around here a long time. I think what's happening is that everybody's getting rabbit ears here, hearing every insult. As you say, the tradition is: unless it's in *Hansard*, it hasn't been heard, no matter what they say. They could tell you your mother wore army boots, but if it doesn't appear in *Hansard*. . . That goes for both sides of the House. One side's leaping up there saying, "They're imputing motives." My God, this is what it's about. We're imputing motives. That's what the whole democratic process is about.

You're supposed to impute that we would ruin the country, and we're supposed to impute that you're ruining the country. So let's not turn into a bunch of crybabies here and have him interfering all the time. Let's sit here and go on.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Redwater. I think we can just pause for a moment and reflect upon those wise words and remember the ones that were uttered earlier by the Chair.

We'll continue with the debate. Calgary-East.

Debate Continued

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member for Redwater, for these wise words.

The people of Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, elected the hon. members opposite to offer some alternatives. I always thought that the opposition is the government in waiting, but looking at the conduct of this opposition, I think they'll be waiting for a long time.

While we have heard statements from the opposition which have sounded good, we have not heard any sound statements. During the election campaign last spring both parties went on the campaign trail and laid out their plans and visions for this province. The Liberals even had to hire a machine to do the clocking and calculation for them. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? It did not help one bit.

We on this side of the House, led by our Premier, are willing to listen and to consult with Albertans. In addition, this government has been willing to take any good ideas which might come from the opposition. Indeed, we would be more than happy to implement them. The throne speech, Mr. Speaker, reflected the thinking, the ideas, and the instruction that Albertans gave to us. Albertans are looking for positive thinking, are looking to the future, and as our Premier said: when Albertans are given the choice between the past and the future, they will choose the future every time.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, this is a caring government, a government which believes in less government, unlike the Liberals, who seem to believe in a huge and impersonal bureaucracy. This government is in the business of getting out of business. Rather this government is in the business of creating an environment which is conducive to business and job creation. This will be achieved by building on our existing advantages of low taxes, a provincial budget which will soon be freed from the burden of paying interest on a huge debt load, and deregulating a province which became somewhat bureaucratic and lethargic during times of plenty. These are tangible things which a government can do to foster economic prosperity and enhance the quality of life its citizens enjoy. What a government cannot do is buy jobs and control economic input. Perhaps the 70-year experiment with communism in the Soviet Union was evidence of how really effective this was.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of job creation we are building on our strength by keeping our taxes the lowest in the country, and according to the president of the Canadian Taxpayers Association, Alberta is going to be the tax haven. Just last week the *Financial Post* editor called Alberta the Switzerland of Canada.

I have some good news to report instead of the doom and gloom that's always coming out from that side of the House, again with the exception of the four government members over there, Mr. Speaker. I had the pleasure of attending two weeks ago the opening of the Greenfield Plastics plant in my constituency. When

completed, this plant will employ 75 full-time people, [interjections] It will provide 75 full-time jobs and occupy – they don't like to hear that – 300,000 square feet of warehouse space, and that's the old ALCB warehouse, hon. minister. [interjections] They don't like to hear good news. This is indeed good news.

AN HON. MEMBER: What about NovAtel for good news?

MR. AMERY: You can live in the past.

Mr. Speaker, I think the one thing the people of Alberta want us to do is to have a balanced budget. A balanced budget would transfer a debt-free province to our children and grandchildren. One thing for sure that the Liberals don't want us to do is to have a balanced budget. It's strange how they change their minds. During the last election the Liberals were playing a distinctly different tune. On May 19 of last year the Leader of the Opposition said that the number one campaign issue was debt, debt, debt, and more debt. Where did they go wrong, or did their CD player run out of batteries?

I can't believe why and how the Liberals would refuse to support the idea of having the school tax dollars follow the students to the classroom. How can they not support the idea, Mr. Speaker, of having the tax dollars follow the patients to the hospital room? Of course, they want the money spent on administration.

Some questions remain to be answered. Are they saying no to government getting out of business? Are they saying no to downsizing, streamlining? Are they saying no to the openness and responsiveness that we committed to the people of this province? Are they saying no to accountability? Mr. Speaker, these questions must be answered by that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition spoke about cuts to social services, and they told us that the people would be thrown out on the street, that young people would turn to committing criminal activities. They are always looking at the negative or the dark side of every issue. But we have proven them wrong. The people who have seen their benefits go down looked at some positive alternative like finding a job or taking some training courses. They're looking optimistically to the future.

In terms of job creation the Premier on his latest mission to southeast Asia has opened the way for more constructive co-operation between Alberta and the southeast Asian countries. I would also urge the Premier to lead a similar mission to the Middle East countries now that stability is coming to that region.

MR. N. TAYLOR: What are you trying to do? Get him killed?

MR. AMERY: It is a developing region. You've been there before, Nick. You haven't been killed.

Mr. Speaker, the Middle East countries are having some stability right now, and we have some good opportunities over there. And you know what? They have the money.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would urge the hon. members on the opposite side to co-operate with us and offer their support and ideas so we can better serve the people who elected us and placed their trust in us.

In light of the hour, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has moved that we do now adjourn debate on the amendment to the Speech from the Throne. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

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