

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 23, 1994**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 94/02/23

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom.

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I had the occasion to visit St. Patrick school in Calgary with the Minister of Education and the members for Calgary-McCall and Calgary-Cross and received a petition with 170 signatures on it asking the government to reconsider "the plan to restructure the educational system in Alberta." They expressed their concern. They felt the proposal was on the friz.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege of presenting petitions with another 150 signatures from residents of Calgary-Cross and Calgary-McCall. The petitions, sir, request that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Alberta "not to implement the plan to restructure the educational system in Alberta, as proposed by the Minister of Education" and further urge the Government . . . to ensure that every Albertan will have the opportunity for input and involvement in future plans to restructure the educational system in Alberta.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 278 citizens of Alberta, primarily from Calgary and the surrounding area. The gist of the petition is asking the Assembly and the government to maintain the full early childhood services program, the kindergarten program, and requesting the government of Alberta to ensure that students with special needs in ECS programs do indeed have their needs looked after.

Thank you.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

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.

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

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I introduced February 14 last now be read and received.

CLERK: We the undersigned

petition our present legislative assembly to pass an act ensuring that Education is an essential service, and receives fiscal respectability as such.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week on February 14 I introduced a petition with a total of 469 names from St. Joseph high school and from Rundle school and a parents group in the city of Edmonton. I now ask that the 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 follow through with proposed cuts in education; cuts to optional programs such as physical education, art, drama, computers, second language, after school athletics, and kindergarten.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file with the Assembly today copies of the Canada/Alberta infrastructure program agreement that was signed on the 18th day of February, 1994.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of a document produced by the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association. It's a response to the restructuring of education in our province and specifically deals with the concerns about the future of the full early childhood services program as well as the future, or the nonfuture perhaps, of the community schools program in Alberta.

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

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file with the House a response to Question 207 and Motion for a Return 210. I'd like to file these with the House now.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like table four copies of real life experiences told to me today by several young volunteers from the Morinville FCSS office. Their stories are poignant, and I urge every government member who thinks FCSS does not matter to read these moving stories.

Thank you.

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of a letter to the Premier from Justin Chadwick, a seven-year-old boy at Cecil Swanson school, and I'll send the original to the Premier.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a number of guests in the public gallery. Mike Duckering and Joyce Duckering are visiting from Bristol, England. Mike Duckering is an architect that will be giving a presentation tonight at the Provincial Museum. It's a presentation sponsored by the Edmonton Society for Urban and Architecture Studies, an organization initiated by Brian Allsopp of this city. They're accompanied today in the public gallery by the current president of the Edmonton Society for Urban and Architecture Studies, Ron Wickman. If they would stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the House three gentlemen who are seated in the members' gallery. Two of the gentlemen are visiting from the province of British Columbia. They are Mr. Bill Forster and Mr. Les Adams. They're accompanied today by a gentleman from Calgary who's very much involved in the Foothills hospital in Calgary, nursing unit 92: Mr. Tom Minhinnett. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House five official members of the University of Alberta Progressive Conservative Club. They are Craig Watt, Shane Henderson, Cam Porter, Jeff Paruk, and Kevin Garner. Craig is running for president of the PC association of the university, and Shane Henderson is running for vice-president. Cam is also the northwestern director. Craig also has the distinction of being a retired senator of the University of Alberta. Craig, I hope you enjoy your retirement. I'd ask you all to stand and have the warm welcome of the House.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 10 enlightened and enthusiastic young Liberals who are here today, among them: Charlotte Wolters, president of the Young Liberals, and Dale Girard, president of the University of Alberta Liberal club. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly seven living examples, real-life examples of individuals who have been affected by this government's budgetary policy as well its ineffective work force adjustment strategies. They are in the members' gallery, and they are Leanne Kinslow, a former public works employee of five and a half years who received no

severance pay; Sharon Ward; Gordon Hosan; Irene Demskie; Linda MacDonald, former ALCB workers; Bill Fleming, a soon-to-be former employee of the Glenrose hospital who was employed there for 20 years and has been given a 10-day severance pay; and Rick Cowles, who's employed at the Glenrose hospital and will receive no severance pay when he leaves. If they will stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 45 students from Virginia Park school in my constituency in Edmonton. They are in the public gallery accompanied by their teachers Miss Webb and Mrs. Nette and a parent helper Mrs. Hoekstra. Would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly visitors to our fair province and this city from the beautiful city of Livermore, California: Alice Ott and her daughter Catherine. They are accompanied today by my wife, Phyllis. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly nine eager, beautiful young faces from St. Mary of the Lake Catholic school located in Slave Lake, Alberta. These young people and the people who have accompanied them have traveled approximately 300 kilometres from north of Edmonton, and I would like to at this time indicate that they come from the home of the Arctic Winter Games. They are accompanied by Mrs. Monique Blakley, their teacher for grade 5-6, and parent Mrs. Brenda Eben-Ebenau and a U of A student Ms Lianne Tardif. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Provincial Budget

MR. DECORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow the Treasurer will unveil what the government calls the most important budget in the province's history. Unbelievably the Premier says that he's got better things to do than to be here for the first three days next week. It seems that the Klein caravan has now become the dodge caravan. Doesn't the Premier think it's more important to be here on Monday to explain and to defend his budget?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, at least I won't be on a yacht in Grand Cayman. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order. [interjections] Order.
The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry, sir; what was the question?

MR. DECORE: There's a budget next week.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the budget is tomorrow, not next week. The budget comes down tomorrow.

I'll tell you where I'm going to be tomorrow. I'm going to be here listening to the Provincial Treasurer deliver one of the finest budgets to be delivered in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and one of the most significant and one of the most critical.

Mr. Speaker, there are numerous members of the government who will be out and about responding to the budget as it affects their various departments. What I'm going to be doing in central Canada is selling on the basis of that budget our tremendous Alberta advantage.

Speaker's Ruling Provoking Debate

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair would remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that questions really ought to be designed to elicit information rather than be argumentative or to make representations.

Provincial Budget (continued)

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows, I know, we all know that the real reason the Premier is going to eastern Canada and dodging the debate on the budget is so that the Premier can raise some money for his political party. That's the real reason.

Speaker's Ruling Provoking Debate

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair would remind the hon. leader that this is question period and not some other stage of our proceedings.

MR. DECORE: That was the question, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, if that was the question, the Chair would invite the hon. Leader of the Opposition to pose his final supplemental.

Provincial Budget (continued)

MR. DECORE: Nothing can be more important in eastern Canada than you staying here, Mr. Premier, and explaining your budget. Will you agree to reschedule your trip and stay here for the debate and face the music?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the budget debate is some 25 days. Can the hon. member of the Liberal opposition not wait three days to spend the next 22 days questioning me about the budget? I mean, my gosh, 25 days of budget debate and he's complaining about three measly days.

MR. SPEAKER: Perhaps we'll have better luck with the second main question.

MR. DECORE: Roger-dodger, Mr. Speaker.

1:50 Freedom of Information Legislation

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, before the election freedom of information was the Premier's personal flagship Bill. It was a sign, the Premier said, of a new openness, a new belief that

Albertans deserved to know more about their government, but the Bill has been stalled by members of the Premier's caucus who believe that truth should be told about the future and not about the past. My first question to the Premier, then, is this: what has happened to the Bill that used to be the most important Bill for the Premier on his own personal agenda?

MR. KLEIN: The Bill, Mr. Speaker, is a government Bill. It is now being considered in our caucus and through our committee system, and in due course it will come to this Legislature and be thoroughly debated.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, this Bill has had the unique situation of having unanimous approval from an all-party committee of this Legislature. Four members of the government participated and were part of that unanimous decision, Mr. Premier. Why the delay?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no delay. As you know, there is a process relative to the preparation of a Bill, and that is the process that relates to form and content to make sure that it is in proper legal terms. When it has gone through that process, it will be tabled in this House, and hopefully with the concurrence of the opposition Liberal Party it will be passed this session.

MR. DECORE: I'd like the Premier to confirm the real facts, and the facts as we understand them and as you know them, Mr. Premier, are that there is a rift in your caucus with those in your caucus . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Caucus Activity

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order. [interjections] Order please. The Chair regretfully has to rule that that question offends several questions of order. It's not a question concerning a government position; it's a question about a parliamentary caucus. It also shouldn't suggest its own answer.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Loan Guarantees

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September of 1993 the government announced that it was reviewing six or seven loan guarantee commitments, and we still haven't heard anything yet. I just want to remind the Premier of his words September 23, 1993, on page 454 in *Hansard*:

All we ask for is the courtesy of . . . time, not a long period of time, to do a thorough review . . . Once that review is complete, all that information will be tabled in this Legislature.

So my question to the Premier is: why is it that a year after this man was elected as Premier this government that wants to get out of the business of being in business is still considering loan guarantees?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely wrong to say that this government is considering loan guarantees. As a matter of fact, this government, outside of Pacific Western Airlines, the one to Canadian, has not granted a loan guarantee. Indeed, we are reviewing some commitments that were made in the past, and I understand the hon. Deputy Premier will be tabling a report on this situation in conjunction with his estimates.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is: since we've been waiting over six months now, could the Premier or the Deputy Premier, whoever may know, if

anyone, over there, tell us today what those loan guarantees are, to whom, and for how much?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, there are no loan guarantees: zero, big zero. I'd be delighted to have my estimates in Economic Development and Tourism designated by the Official Opposition at the first sitting day. They can designate. I'll come here the first opportunity after the budget has been presented to have a full and open discussion with respect to this. But let me just underline it again: there are no guarantees done by this government under the policy announced by the Premier of the province of Alberta.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Speaker, this is the government that raised the issue of the six or seven loan guarantees. So all Albertans know what kind of risk you're exposing them to again, the question we want to have answered is: when will that review be completed? More cookies? More pork?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, we'll try again. At one time in an era prior to the leadership of our current Premier there were some commitments made with respect to guarantees. We have evaluated these files. We are providing no loan guarantees to anyone. The answer to it is zero. I said that I'd be very, very pleased to come here in the next number of days if I have my estimates designated at the first opportunity. The Liberal Party can do this. They can call a department, and I'll come should they wish to do that at the first opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps I'll just whet the appetite today. We said that there are no loan guarantees. At one time there was a loan guarantee provided to the Edmonton Space and Science Centre. This was a loan guarantee of over \$1 million. We have discussed this particular portfolio with the Edmonton Space and Science Centre, an organization here in the city of Edmonton, a nonprofit organization. They no longer require a loan guarantee and such is the resolution with the other ones that were being evaluated.

We'd be delighted at the appropriate time to do that, Mr. Speaker.

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

Family and Community Support Services

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday during question period in yet another attempt at fear mongering it was stated by a member opposite that rural Alberta is against changes being made to FCSS. As a former FCSS board member I continue to support this community-based program. However, as a former mayor of a rural community I also value local autonomy and have long supported, advocated, and spoken out for unconditional grants. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What is the position of the provincial association that represents Alberta's cities, towns, villages, and summer villages?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, there have been a lot of comments made on the FCSS policy. Nothing has changed with the FCSS policy. Last night in the committee the AUMA president and some of the executive were present to present some of their comments in regard to the upcoming changes that are going on. It was brought to them about the FCSS funding and how it would go into a block funding program, and we asked where they stood in their support. They said: we represent some 285 municipalities, or 86 percent of the population in the province of Alberta, and we stand on record in 1988 as having passed a resolution in support of block funding. They reconfirmed that last night in

front of the committee, that they indeed did support this type of policy where the programs were brought together into a block and that they would look forward to the administration of it. They did understand the sensitivity of it, but they said that right now the 150 FCSS boards out there serving 96 percent of Albertans were under the direction, many of them with representatives from the municipalities sitting on them, and that the process would not change.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: will FCSS programming continue to be cost shared through the Canada assistance program?

2:00

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, of course a portion of the total budget of FCSS is cost shared. I think it's only fair for Albertans to know that only 17 percent of the budget has been cost shared in the past and no doubt will continue to be cost shared. So there will be no changes in that area.

In addition to that, I presently have six regional consultants under my department who will continue the function they've done in the past. In addition to that, I have four additional staff, support staff in my department that will continue supporting the municipalities in the process.

MRS. GORDON: Does anything change in the way organizations work with municipalities to access FCSS services and/or funding?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, presently of course the structure of FCSS at the local level is an autonomous board pretty well from the province. They've always been like that. I was a former chairperson of one and a member of another one and also a former municipal councillor representing the municipal councils on FCSS. The boards were always designed so local issues were dealt with at the local level, and local programs were established along with budgets. I can't see that process changing. In fact, I believe the municipalities have more authority to redesign the programs the way they see fit.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Kindergarten Programs

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know this government has chopped the early childhood education program in half, yet many school boards feel that they should continue to offer the full 400-hour program at a fee to parents. Now, on February 14 the Premier assured all of us that everybody is treated equally and fairly with respect to ECS. So my question is to the Premier. Why didn't the Premier and his planners foresee that cutting this program would lead to the development of a two-tier system?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can it be a two-tiered system when all the jurisdictions offering ECS will be provided with the same number of hours, 200 hours? This was deemed to be adequate preparation time for entry into grade 1. It's as simple as that.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Two-tier: when it's whole for the rich and half for the poor.

Supplementary again to the Premier: if he didn't intend to introduce a two-tier system, what does he plan to do to prevent the establishment of one?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question here is one of basics. What is required in terms of preparing a preschooler for grade 1? It has been deemed that 200 hours is adequate preparation time. I guess that if there are communities that want to provide services over and above what is necessary to prepare the child for entry into grade 1, that is entirely up to them.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I don't know, Mr. Speaker; I think this vaunted plan looks more and more like Swiss cheese: full of holes.

To the Premier: since the minister of social services yesterday said that parents who can't afford these extra charges would be able to apply for special funding, doesn't this in fact mean that the government recognizes the need for a full kindergarten program?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, certainly in the Education business plan there has been adequate provision made for those areas that have been identified as high-needs areas, and that's what the hon. minister was alluding to. The hon. Member for West Yellowhead has the obvious answer for all of these things. If his quote in the newspaper is right, he says that the simple solution is simply to raise taxes.

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

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, because the issue of the poor was mentioned during the question, I'd like to advise the Assembly that my department alone will be spending over \$4 billion over the next three years. [interjections] Four billion dollars over the next three years.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order. Order please.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Access to Adoption Information

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Family and Social Services conducted public meetings across the province in the latter part of 1993 on adoption records. Bill 208, the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1994, which passed second reading last October, was used as the basis or the starting point for those discussions on opening adoption records. My question to the minister: has a report been completed from those meetings?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, my department officials held over 20 public meetings across Alberta, consulted with over 1,000 Albertans, and received close to 500 written submissions from Albertans in relation to this subject. The report has now been filed with my department. I am reviewing it right now and hopefully will come out with a decision on it in the near future.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is: when does the minister feel that the government will be in a position to take action on opening adoption records?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, because of some of the issues that are dealt with in relation to adoptions and some of the confidentiality that's involved in the process, it is a reasonably complicated issue. The process we have in place right now has been around for a long time, and if we do make the changes as we propose to do, we want to make sure the changes are done right and complete for the satisfaction of Albertans that are involved in the process. You can be assured that as soon as the review is completed by myself and the department, I will be introducing legislation to this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the minister could at least give assurance that it could be introduced in this spring session, at least an introduction of the Bill.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I believe it's legislation that's required to change as soon as possible, and if this minister is capable of making those changes before this spring sitting, I will do that. If not, at the latest it will be the fall sitting.

Education Funding

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, it's a shame in this Assembly that people who make constructive criticism about two-tier educational systems are referred to as fear mongerers. Prior to the session the Deputy Premier said of Barrhead schools that they get \$1.5 million a year funding that they wouldn't necessarily get with a different MLA. Last week in this House the Premier said that he was going to treat every child equally. Could the Premier explain to the House how it should make any difference who your MLA is in terms of educational funding in this province?

MR. KLEIN: I guess it shouldn't. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray should know, because all you need to do is go to Fort McMurray and see a city with the most tremendous amenities of any municipal jurisdiction in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray, supplemental question.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then perhaps the Premier would reach out and explain to the people in Fort McMurray why they have the highest school tax levy anywhere in this province.

2:10

MR. KLEIN: If Mayor Guy Boutilier and the MLA would like to sit down with our Minister of Municipal Affairs, perhaps we could sort it out. I understand that in Fort McMurray . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, are they interested in hearing the answer? Obviously the hon. Member for Fort McMurray has not educated his caucus. Indeed, there is a tremendous process going on in Fort McMurray to try to regionalize the services there and attain a greater tax base for that wonderful municipality.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs wishes to augment. [interjections] Order please.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I think that it's fair to not leave something laying on the table from a question that insinuates something that isn't true. The local boards and the local municipalities requisition the mill rate for education at the present time.

It's a local issue. It goes right back to the city of Fort McMurray and the requisitioning and the mill rate they set for that. So, please, don't leave the impression here that it's set at the present time in Edmonton. It is not. If the hon. member would like to come in, I could spend time with my department and educate . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. GERMAIN: To the Premier: what steps will the Premier be taking to rebuild public confidence in the fairness of educational funding allocation in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Education has set out for this government and the people of Alberta a course of action to restructure education, to streamline education, to reduce the cost of administration relative to education, and to get more money to where it rightfully belongs, and that's in the classroom.

MR. KOWALSKI: A point of order, Mr. Speaker, under 23 . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order please. Points of order are raised after question period. The point is noted.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

MR. SOHAL: Mr. Speaker, last night I attended a meeting of parents, teachers, and students at St. Patrick school in Calgary to discuss the restructuring of the education system and balancing of the budget. At the meeting it was repeatedly suggested that our policies are guided by the book *Unfinished Business* by Sir Roger Douglas. I believe that our policies are based on the input that we receive from the people of Alberta. My question is to the Premier. Would the Premier set the record straight for my constituents, that they do indeed have a say in the decision-making process?

AN HON. MEMBER: Don't blink.

MR. KLEIN: No. We won't blink as a matter of fact.

Mr. Speaker, it's quite obvious that we're acting in accordance with the wishes of the people, because what we are doing today is precisely what we told the people we would do prior to the 15th of June. We said that we would balance the budget in four years, that we would attack the fundamental administration of government to reduce as much administrative costs . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, with respect to Sir Roger Douglas, I've never met the man. Notwithstanding what the *Edmonton Journal* might say in its editorial, I have never met Sir Roger Douglas. Yes, he did give a presentation at one time to our caucus, but in no way, shape, or form is he our guiding light. The course of action that we have set for this government, this province, and the people of this province is based on what the people told us.

MR. SOHAL: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Provincial Treasurer. Mr. Treasurer, while the New Zealand experience is interesting, would you please tell the House what impact, if any, the New Zealand experience has on our fiscal policies?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the only impact that New Zealand has on the province of Alberta is the fact that they can be held up as an illustration of what will happen if we fail to take the action

this government is taking today. The tragedy is that what countries around the world have learned is that high levels of debt give your creditors more influence over your budgetary decisions than voters. I can say that in this province the lessons that were learned by New Zealand, by Sweden, by Italy, all around the world, are ones that we are learning before we face the problems that those countries have faced. With the action that we are taking, with our pursuit of not just eliminating the deficit by 1996-97 but by restructuring and renewing the programs that are important to Albertans - education, health care, and social services - so that those programs meet Albertans' needs: that is the approach we are taking. It's going to build in the end a stronger economy with lower taxation that's going to draw people here to invest their money, and that's what creates jobs for Albertans.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly.

Family and Community Support Services (continued)

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. FCSS has been sent off to a slow and painful death by a government more concerned with dollars than helping people in need. The Premier says that he wants to hear from Albertans about changes like this, and he has but apparently only from some of them. To the Premier: was it the Premier's office which issued orders through Conservative MLAs to muzzle FCSS groups from speaking out against the plan?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you. The answer's no.

MS HANSON: My question is to the Premier again. What will the Premier say to FCSS groups to make them feel safe when they do speak out?

MR. KLEIN: As a former municipal legislator I know what FCSS is all about, and if I understand, the process was really those groups coming in, meeting then with the chairman of the community services committee, setting priorities. I don't see where anything is really going to change other than municipalities will have even more flexibility than they have right now.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot of concern out there, and since the minister seems content to see the death of FCSS, will the Premier meet with those FCSS groups to hear their fears?

MR. KLEIN: The hon. member must have some idea as to how many groups there are in the province. I would say that there are literally hundreds and hundreds of groups that depend on FCSS for a certain degree of support. It would be impossible to meet with all of those groups. But, yes, Mr. Speaker, if they want to send a representative, then certainly I would be very happy to meet with that representative along with the ministers of Municipal Affairs and social services for that matter.

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

2:20 Municipal Infrastructure Program

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we heard some good news for Albertans. We heard that the national infrastructure program will have over \$518 million for allocation to municipalities, and we also learned that applications from the municipal government for this program will have a lot of variations, with the widest definitions possible and no one consistent way of application. My question is to the hon. minister of economic development. Given the wide definition, is this program only for municipal government or can other local government jurisdictions apply; for example, hospital boards who need capital funding for restructuring renovation?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, this is a municipal infrastructure program and was announced by the federal government to be such. The agreement maintains, at least in the province of Alberta, that this program will be driven by municipal governments. They will initiate the program. They will put up the first one-third of the dollars. They will make the application. So the program is restricted to municipal governments. However, there would be a provision – and we would accept such a thing – that if a municipality were to basically say to a local hospital board, a health board, or some other group, "We think your project is the priority project in the municipality" and if they made an arrangement at the local level, then in essence we would consider that, but it would still have to be initiated by the municipal government with the municipal one-third dollars in there.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So to relook at that, that means, then, that if local jurisdictions cannot apply through the province, which is what I think I'm hearing, they can apply for the funding through the municipalities and a joint proposal could be developed.

MR. KOWALSKI: That flexibility would exist, Mr. Speaker, because it would begin at the local level in terms of local priorities. So in the city of Calgary if the city council basically said that there was nothing that would fall within the municipal jurisdiction of the city of Calgary and they wanted to say that this health priority or this educational priority was the number one and they worked the arrangement through the city, the city would make a public resolution and say that this is what they want to do, put their one-third dollars against that school project or that educational project. We would consider that.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what we've heard the hon. minister of economic development say is fairly significant. That brings to mind the question: will the government put in guidelines for applications to encourage the municipalities who are eligible to work with the other jurisdictions who are not to make sure that the funds are spent on highest needs, as we've just heard?

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, this matter was reviewed in this House on Monday night and Tuesday night of last week. During the discussion and debate, which lasted some five hours, this matter was made by this minister on several occasions.

In terms of the consultation that we've had with the leaders of the Alberta Association of MDs and Counties and the Alberta

Urban Municipalities Association and the Association of Alberta Improvement Districts and in fact in the consultations we've had with the mayors of the two large cities in this province, Edmonton and Calgary, we indicated that we would be going with the maximum flexibility. In the information that has been conveyed to all municipal governments in the province of Alberta, we have a paragraph written in a document that basically says that flexibility is a key on this.

How they will determine and what they will do to determine their priority needs in any particular municipality is entirely up to them. This program will be initiated by the local municipal government. It will require a resolution of that municipal council, and if they work out that it's other than perhaps a sewer system or a pothole, something else of the highest priority, we will be very, very happy to consider the application, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seniors' Use of Prescription Drugs

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Statistics indicate that Alberta seniors use an average of 20 prescriptions annually. That is three times the provincial average. This hurts seniors and puts them in hospitals. To the hon. Minister of Health: what is your plan to stop the overmedication of seniors?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that is of great concern to seniors' groups across Canada and to ministers of health across Canada. Indeed, Alberta Health is playing a lead role with the ministers of health across Canada to look at ways that we can alleviate that. I will be working very closely with my colleague the minister responsible for seniors on this very issue, and we are looking at strategies that will assist our seniors.

Some very positive things have happened in our own province. We have assistance through home care for working with our seniors in lodges, in some cases assisting them with medications. There have certainly been some initiatives made in producing a container that will identify medication so there's less chance of mixing.

It is a serious concern, and it is a concern across Canada. The ministers of health have taken this as a very serious initiative that we will be working on.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you. What recommendations have you made to the College of Physicians and Surgeons regarding this very serious matter?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I should say, Mr. Speaker, that it's a concern not just of the college. It certainly is a concern of the medical profession but also the pharmacists in our province. They are working on initiatives where they are able now through computerization of prescriptions to ensure that duplicate prescriptions are not offered, prescriptions that might have an adverse effect if two were taken at the same time, and that initiative is progressing very well. I think it's a matter that has to be worked on in a combined effort. I don't think it's the responsibility of any one group, but by having our medical community and our pharmacists working together, we will reduce that risk to our seniors.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Considering all the effort the minister has put into controlling the cost of insured drugs, why hasn't the minister done anything about this huge cost?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, I think that if the member had listened to the first two answers, he would be assured that the minister is indeed addressing this very serious concern and not just on a financial cost basis but on a health basis and a concern that we have for the health of our seniors. I have indicated that it is not simply something that the Minister of Health can deal with alone, that it will take the work of our pharmacists, our medical community, our community care workers, and indeed ministers of health and their workers from across Canada to deal with this very important issue.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council I'd like to supplement and respond to some of the concerns that have been raised. The Seniors Advisory Council has developed a program called Energize, Don't Tranquilize, which has been very successful in bringing the issue of overmedication to seniors, and it has been locally developed and spoken to and practised throughout the province. In addition, the advisory council spoke to the National Advisory Council on Aging in conjunction with the issues raised by the Minister of Health in order to put on the national agenda the concerns for seniors with respect to medication. So I'd like to suggest that the solutions to this problem don't deal strictly with the Minister of Health, but there's also an education component that is the responsibility of the community at large, and the advisory council has taken that very seriously.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a question.

Federal Budget

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I have a question with respect to the efforts that were undertaken in Ottawa yesterday with respect to the federal budget. The document that was brought down sent many signals across this country, and some of them are a little alarming for the province of Alberta. So my question to the Provincial Treasurer is: if he could give an overview of the impact on Alberta . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Seeking an Opinion

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. This is like a question asking for a comment, which the Chair has mentioned before, but if the hon. Provincial Treasurer can give something of a brief and succinct nature that would be useful . . . [interjections] Order. The Chair will decide whether the answer is appropriate.

2:30

Federal Budget (continued)

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I know you would want me to be succinct, and I know the Member for Calgary-Currie would want me to be succinct, but let me say this: yesterday's budget was a big disappointment for the province of Alberta because while the Liberal government in Ottawa chose to shut down Harvey barracks in Calgary and while they chose to have an impact on Canadian forces base Edmonton . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order please. The Chair is going to give the Provincial Treasurer the opportu-

nity to finish this question in a succinct manner. The time wasted by the opposition making noises so that he cannot be heard will be charged against question period, so let's bear with the Provincial Treasurer.

In a brief and succinct manner.

Federal Budget (continued)

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, while the Liberal government chose to cut spending for Harvey barracks, their spending went up. Their spending went up; it did not go down. Their revenue expectations are based on exceedingly optimistic expectations of growth that has never happened in this country for the last 20 years. [interjections] So I would say that while it is a good first start, it is a disappointment. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order please. The Chair will recognize the Provincial Treasurer again, but why does the opposition have to be so rude? Absolutely outrageous. [interjections] Order please. When the opposition is asking questions, the Assembly gives the opposition a chance to be heard. Now, why won't the opposition give the government a chance to be heard when they're replying to questions?

MR. DECORE: That's opinion, sir. It's opinion.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition is not to debate with the Chair. All the Chair can say to that comment is that opinion is certainly in the eye of the beholder, as displayed by the opposition.

The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Federal Budget (continued)

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that the government in Ottawa has chosen to continue to live beyond its means while this government in this part of the country is trying to get its financial house in order and live within the taxpayers' means.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within the constituency of Calgary-Currie is the Canadian forces base, so there is a very serious concern on the economic impact. To the Premier of the province . . .

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair has had the occasion before to remind the hon. member that there are to be no preambles to supplementals. Supplemental question, please.

Federal Budget (continued)

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Premier of the province identify to this Assembly the economic impact of the changes in the Canadian armed forces bases in the city of Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Well, it's difficult to assess the impact at this moment. We do know that the per capita defence spending will remain about the same but at a lower level. In other words, for '93-94 we'll probably be number five in Canada. However, as the downscaling takes place, this will remove us to about a seventh place position by the year 1996-1997. I guess what we will have to do is devise a plan. I would ask the Liberals to perhaps work with us, especially as it effects Namao in Edmonton. Certainly I'll be working with my hon. colleague relative to CFB Calgary and Harvey barracks, which is in my constituency, to see what we can do to provide some compensating factors, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

MRS. BURGNER: No, Mr. Speaker.

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

Speaker's Ruling Privilege

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair has received notice of two questions of privilege. They both arrived at the same time, and they both relate to matters concerning the budget. Therefore, the Chair has asked the hon. members who have raised these matters to make a very brief statement of their point that does not lead into any form of debate, because the hon. members on the other side are not present, nor the ministers. Therefore, the Chair would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-North West first to fulfill the requirements of the Standing Order with regard to this question of privilege.

Privilege Access to Budget Information

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take your advice certainly. I'm not quite sure exactly how far you want me to proceed down the line. The concern that I have has been raised in the past by members of the opposition regarding information on the budget that has been provided to government members and denied to members of the opposition side. There are a number of citations that I could give at this point, if that's the direction you would like me to go, respecting my concerns, or we could debate it at a further time. I'm not quite sure how much detail you want me to go into at this time.

MR. SPEAKER: The Standing Orders require the hon. members to raise their point, and therefore the Chair does not want to prejudice hon. members. So it's just the very briefest outline of what the complaint is.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think I can outline my concern in a matter of just a couple of minutes, if that would be all right. So I would just like to do that. I'm looking at *Erskine May, Parliamentary Practice*, 21st edition.

MR. SPEAKER: I don't think the Chair wants to hear about the legal aspects of the complaint. It's the factual. It's merely the factual situation that's behind the complaint.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The concerns deal with statements made by the minister of transportation, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, regarding a hotel or a hospital, depending upon how you look at them, in his constituency and information that he has received about that particular project as compared to information that the Member for

Fort McMurray by contrast has been denied about a similar project in his own constituency. So the concern that I have is information dealing with the budget, about capital construction projects. Perhaps I can just leave my concern at that point then.

Privilege Access to Budget Information

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15(1) and (2), et cetera, I did notify you that I wanted to raise a matter of privilege and that basically the matter of privilege has to do with the provision of information to Members of the Legislative Assembly.

There's a long-standing practice in the House that, number one, budget secrecy would be sacrosanct and also that all members of this House shall be treated equally and shall be provided with equal information at the same time. Specifically to the second point, Mr. Speaker, it is my information that government members received, in addition to the information that was provided through the media and by matter of release from the government, not only the general grant levels that would be announced that would be given in terms of education for each school board but a detailed, board-by-board description of not only the general grants and the general operating/instruction grants but also amounts such as the special education block, the distance learning, the fiscal equity grants, et cetera, in great detail.

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

MR. HENRY: It is also my information that several members of the government caucus were able to provide this to their local school board.

MR. SPEAKER: Is there no way that the hon. member could make his factual situation more succinct? The hon. member will have the opportunity to set out the thing in full.

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. I was just trying to be clear.

The bottom line is that detailed grant information that was not available to members of the opposition and therefore not available to their school boards at an earlier time was in fact available to government members, and in fact some government members – I want to be clear on that; my information is about some government members – were able to provide that information to their local jurisdictions. Mr. Speaker, I believe that to be a breach of my privilege as a member, at the most, and, at the least, certainly a contempt of the democratic processes that this House stands for.

Thank you.

2:40

MR. SPEAKER: Points of order will come after points of privilege.

The Member for Calgary-North West and the Member for Edmonton-Centre have raised matters of privilege under Standing Order 15, and they have complied with the requirements of Standing Order 15 by giving the Chair the proper notice and rising in their places and setting out briefly the nature of their complaint.

The unfortunate situation that the Chair has before it is that the hon. members who have allegedly caused these points of privilege are not present. Also, the questions revolve around the budget. Since the hon. Minister of Education is not present and the hon. members for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and Medicine Hat are not

present, the Chair rules that pursuant to Standing Order 15(3) the matter cannot be fairly dealt with until everyone involved in this point is present in the Assembly.

The Chair also is bearing in mind that the budget will be presented tomorrow. It will have some bearing, the Chair feels, on this matter, on these questions. Accordingly, the debate as to whether there is a prima facie case of privilege will occur on Monday.

Point of Order

Interrupting a Member

MR. SPEAKER: Now we have some points of order that the Chair has been advised that members want to make, the first of which was notice from the hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to bring up a point of order, *Beauchesne* 415 and 319, and in reference to Standing Order 13(4)(b), where no member shall "interrupt that member, except to raise a point of order."

Mr. Speaker, I sat here from a quarter to 2 until about 20 after 2 trying to hear answers from the Premier, the Deputy Premier, and numerous ministers, to the constant heckling and interruption and noise especially from Edmonton-Centre and Spruce Grove-St. Albert. [interjections] They can't even be quiet while I make a point of order. I don't know if it's the unfortunate position that we sit in here, but it makes it very, very difficult to hear anything when 32 percent of the squirrels who want out of the cage are constantly yapping off at the mouth here. I would appreciate a little bit of quiet so we can hear the members from the other side.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Speaker, I think that was an excellent point of order. Unfortunately, the member isn't aware of some other points that are also raised in *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*. I would draw the Speaker's attention to 409(3), "The question ought to seek information and . . . cannot seek an opinion"; 410(7), "Brevity both in questions and answers is of great importance"; 410(8), "Preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions require no preambles."

Mr. Speaker, the member says that we raised some concerns during question period. Well, those were the issues we raised during question period. The questions that are sometimes brought forward by members of the government side are issues that certainly provoke debate or response on this side of the House. If it's desired that that not happen, perhaps they could craft their questions a little more carefully.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 15(6) wherein it states that the point of privilege should be "raised at the earliest opportunity." I note with great interest that the Speaker has indicated that this matter – perhaps I misunderstood – could somehow be rolled into a debate that relates to the budget. This has nothing to do with the issue of the budget as a whole. This is information. Two MLAs had information that . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition I think misunderstood the Chair. The Chair, after giving the hon. members for Calgary-North West and Edmonton-Centre the opportunity to make their points of privilege as required by Standing Order 15 so that they don't lose their right to raise this

matter, deferred the argument over the question of privilege until Monday because of the fact that hon. members involved in the points of privilege – it's not customary to proceed with points of privilege when other members are affected by those points. There's ample precedent for that. The last one that the Chair can recall is when the then hon. Member for Camrose had a disagreement with the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*. When the hon. Member for Camrose was raising that point in the last Legislature, the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* wasn't here, and the Chair ruled that the matter would be deferred. That's the same thing that is happening now.

Point of Order

Interrupting a Member

MR. SPEAKER: Were there any other interventions on the point raised by the hon. Member for Little Bow? If not, we'll dispose of that one and then proceed to the hon. Deputy Premier.

The Chair appreciates some of the comments of the hon. Member for Little Bow because, as the Assembly will have noticed, the Chair has not been entirely happy with the decorum that has existed in this Chamber since the Assembly resumed, particularly since February 14. Nevertheless, the Chair really doesn't appreciate the hon. Member for Little Bow challenging the Chair's ability to control the atmosphere here. The Chair is doing its level best to control the atmosphere. [some applause] The Chair is almost embarrassed by the applause received from the hon. opposition caucus in these circumstances, because in all honesty the Chair believes that the hon. Member for Little Bow has a complaint about being able to hear what is going on. The Chair is going to use this opportunity again to remind the hon. members in the opposition that because they disagree with something doesn't give opposition members the right to shut the Assembly down. Nowhere is that written in any citation in *Erskine May* or *Beauchesne* or *Standing Orders*. That is just not on.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: It's custom.

MR. SPEAKER: It is not custom. I hear the comment from the opposition benches that it's custom. That's nowhere custom in this Assembly. Hon. members should get that out of their minds because that is not proper. So the Chair will use this point of order as a platform on which to urge all hon. members to try to get back to where we were in the First Session of this Legislature, because quite frankly the way we've been going for the last number of days is not customary in this Assembly.

The hon. Deputy Premier, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MR. KOWALSKI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on the point of order and cite Standing Order 23(g)(h) and (i) with respect to the matter that I wish to raise. In a preamble to a question that the Member for Fort McMurray raised today, he made a statement to the effect that I had said that if they had another MLA, they wouldn't be getting it, or something along those lines.

2:50

Now, I've requested the Blues to come in, Mr. Speaker, and I haven't had that, but that's what I heard. The reality is that what that statement had to do with the question that the hon. member is raising befuddles me, but then I'm not surprised at that

considering the source. Here's what I said. I was quoted in the paper dated December 14, 1993. I put in, quote:

Some boards are going into a deficit. Barrhead claims to be poor and yet has \$1 million (in reserves) and also gets this additional \$1.5 million a year and I think if they had a different MLA they wouldn't necessarily be getting it.

This quote was provided in a newspaper article along with a series of other quotes on the subject matter of fiscal equity with respect to the school systems within the constituency that I have. Now, let me make it very clear: there's a dramatic difference between somebody saying they wouldn't be getting it or they wouldn't necessarily be getting it. Now, having made that point, however, I do want to assure the Assembly of the context and the manner in which it was done.

I believe that under Standing Orders, the three citations that I quoted, the hon. member has in fact provided aspersions.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the spring of 1993 there was an election campaign in the province of Alberta, and the Liberal Party campaigned on the basis of, quote, brutal cuts and \$1.3 billion in reductions. They advertised in the papers from the north to the south to the east to the west. They pointed out: elect us and we will have brutal cuts. This was the phraseology used by the leader of the Liberal Party. Nothing was to be exempted. Well, if you consider \$1.3 billion in brutal cuts and reductions, then in essence every organization in the constituency I represent is going to be affected and impacted. There was an alternative, and that alternative was the candidate who ran for the Progressive Conservative Party. In the program put forth by the leader of the province of Alberta we were talking about balancing the budget over four years and reductions in the neighbourhood of about \$800 million. That difference of \$1.3 billion to \$800 million is very, very significant. You can be assured that if my constituents would have elected a Liberal and they would have formed the government, they most definitely would not have received this extra amount of dollars that they're getting because I happen to be a member of the Progressive Conservative government in the province of Alberta.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have campaigned from day one on the principle of fiscal equity. My opponent in Barrhead riding campaigned against fiscal equity, as the Liberal Party has campaigned against fiscal equity in the province of Alberta. There are some boards in the province that are poor boards that would not survive without fiscal equity. That \$1.5 million is a result of the fiscal equity program of this government. If they would have elected a Liberal government, they most certainly would not have received that \$1.5 million.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I also happen to be one of those individuals who not only did campaign for fiscal equity, but I also got it put in place, along with this government and the members of my government. We have \$30 million under the Alberta lottery fund, and four boards get the benefit. There is no doubt at all that if there would have been a Liberal government in the province of Alberta, they would not have that, and my residents along with a lot of other residents in this province would have been disposed of in a different way.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair feels that the rules have provided the hon. Deputy Premier with an opportunity to clarify the situation which was caused by an improper preamble by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray. After listening to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, the Chair couldn't really connect anything in the question with that part of his preamble. Therefore, the Chair will certainly look upon this point of order

as a disagreement between the hon. members as to what the facts of the situation are.

MR. GERMAIN: With respect, Mr. Speaker, do I not get a chance to connect the preamble before you . . .

MR. SPEAKER: No. In this case you will not get a chance. Further questions of order? Orders of the Day.

AN HON. MEMBER: There's a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Oh, there is a further point of order.

Point of Order Privilege

MR. DAY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You had earlier acknowledged my point of order on the point of privilege. You have ruled on 15(3), and certainly we abide by that ruling. We appreciate the difficult situation in which you find yourself in these circumstances.

I would ask, with respect, for a ruling from yourself, Mr. Speaker, on Standing Order 15(4). It does reference the fact that the matter shall be deferred to the next day that the member is present unless the Speaker rules that, in the circumstances, the matter may be dealt with in the member's absence.

So with respect, from the point of view that both members referred to by the points of privilege have passed on to me information and also due to the fact that the Liberal caucus even before question period was over of course did their scurrying to the media and printed out their little media notice on this, it puts the government and certain members at somewhat of a disadvantage over the next couple of days. I leave the ruling to you, Mr. Speaker. We'll abide by whatever you rule with. I do have information, however, from both those members which would only take me a few seconds to bring out and which would dispel like a cloud of sour gas the absolutely unsubstantiated claims of points of privilege and would show that they are no more than the cheapest form of political opportunism.

MR. SPEAKER: That opportunity will be given on Monday.

Point of Order Reflections on the Speaker

MR. MITCHELL: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House leader is suggesting that you are party to political opportunism, because it's you who has told us not to proceed with these points of privilege today. I would suggest that member is completely out of order and should apologize to you for casting that aspersion.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair thanks both hon. members for their contributions, but it does not alter the ruling of the Chair that these questions of privilege will be dealt with on Monday.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that the written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that the motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 165.

[Motion carried]

Privatization

M165. Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of internal working documents or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government from January 1, 1993, to February 10, 1994, pertaining to the privatization of the delivery of government operations that can be handled more effectively by the private sector.

DR. PERCY: I moved this motion because I think it is important that we understand the dynamics that have led to the privatization of the ALCB, privatization of certain aspects of corporate registries, and other aspects of privatization or outsourcing that have occurred within government. We would like to see the background studies that lead the government to conclude that this can be accomplished more effectively through privatization than by delivery by government. While I'm quite willing to believe that may be the case, I certainly hope it is the case that the government has documentation, has studies that demonstrate that to be true. Certainly looking at how privatization has occurred in some instances and the confusion that has surrounded it, it leads one to be somewhat skeptical that it was in fact a planned exercise. So that is the basis for which this motion for a return has been brought forward, Mr. Speaker.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I reject this Motion 165. First of all, its time frame that is spelled out in this motion goes beyond a logical approach to this question. January 1, '93, is before an election on June 15, at which time I was re-appointed as Minister of Municipal Affairs and at which time certain developments took place in relationship to privatization as we went forward. I believe it could have been reworded in a different way.

3:00

Secondly, it's too broad. It goes on to almost all of the initiatives that we might do: from outsourcing right through to the privatization of ALCB, all of the minuscule-type decisions that are made in three-year plans and that might be related to privatization of certain elements. In the essence of putting together that type of background information and documentation, it would be too costly, an overburden of paperwork in this. In a minute I'll get to showing where that is not acceptable or a responsibility that I have to this House.

I would also say that the individual has to be reminded that in the privatization of certain elements there is a tremendous human resource factor. There are thousands, literally thousands of individuals that, due to privatization, will have to plan their lives and move on in new directions. In the essence of an ongoing privatization I think it would harm and jeopardize many of their approaches to what they're doing by bringing forth all of that information at once. There are privatizations that are going on at the present time where the negotiations have to be brought forward in consultation with the private sector, with certain elements of materials that would jeopardize the privileged information that individuals have in our society.

Now, in saying that, I would like to bring forth *Beauchesne* 446 for all hon. members of this Assembly to have a look at and to

stand perhaps as an example so that when they're formulating these motions, they could look at them and perhaps understand what rights they have in asking for information at the present time. We will be bringing in a privacy Act, an Act that will certainly look at certain details in the future. But look at *Beauchesne* 446. I don't want to go into length, Mr. Speaker. It's over three pages, on 129, 130, 131, and it lays out specifically what criteria are to be applied in determining if the government papers or documents should be exempt from production in this Assembly. It does get into, if you go down in one section here, section 2, and you can follow down to various ones:

- (j) Papers relating to negotiations leading up to a contract until the contract has been executed or the negotiations have been concluded.

Of course in the privatization of ALCB many of those contracts are ongoing at the present time. That would preclude me from having to table those plans in the Assembly under that section.

- (n) Papers that are private or confidential and not of a public or official character.

Again, some of the privatizations have to do with in-depth reviews and studies and asking for interest by the private sector, who have sent a tremendous amount of details of their operations, some of them not accepted in registries or in others, but those papers and that information is sitting there within my department.

- (o) Internal departmental memoranda.

Again, during the process of developing a privatization, countless hours are spent not only in committee but in personal debate with my department, with my department heads, with the ALCB, whether it's registries, motor vehicles division, and brainstorming back and forth, and personal input as well as memorandums going back and forth. Until we come to a conclusion about which direction to take, to ask that that type of detail of all my personal papers be dropped in this Assembly, I think this section of *Beauchesne* precludes that in this Assembly.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I think you can see, and if people would read 446 they could see in detail that this type of motion is poorly worded and does not catch the essence of the intent of what a minister must do in the day-to-day workings of his department to bring forth decisions that affect our society in general.

I do appreciate and know the intent of why the individual would like this information. I will be making a full report on the privatization initiatives to the Assembly. I would like to someday report in detail to the people of Alberta and to the members of this Assembly as to all of the trials and tribulations and all the background that went through in the planning process as well as the delivery, all of the different types of problems that we ran into during privatization, in taking such a thing as ALCB, a 70-year-old, well-entrenched Crown corporation whose embryo was stated in temperance and prohibition. Someday I would like to make a report of just what it takes to privatize such a convoluted Crown corporation, and I want those reports to stand as an example of why Crown corporations should be avoided at the utmost and that we should look to the private sector in the beginning rather than the end, because certainly trying to bring forth clear and concise plans to privatize, as I said, such a convoluted organization as some of the Crown corporations are is almost an impossibility to deliver to this Assembly. But I will to the utmost of my ability in the end deliver the facts, the figures, and the directions that we've taken and lay them out as an example to future governments of why not to get into some of these organizations that we're in and how to get out of them and get on to the future.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, as is so often the case, after listening to the comments of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I'm provoked to stand in the House and offer my observations. Sir, it strikes me as odd in the extreme that a minister with as much influence in the government of the day as the last speaker should stand and set out the reasons in the fashion he has, reasons that I would think would be absolutely embarrassing to a government that ran and won an election on June 15 on the basis of openness and accountability.

You know, when the hon. minister talks about a report that he can't wait to share with Albertans, it tells us exactly what's wrong with the approach of this government. What happens is: the government acts first, comes into this House long after the implementation is done for some kind of retroactive sanction. You know, it is important that we see that report, and I'm interested in seeing the analysis that the hon. minister refers to, but I want to see it before the decision is made, not six months, not nine months after.

DR. WEST: You weren't elected.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister in his off-the-record comments makes the point. Each of us elected in this Legislature was elected by 30,000-odd electors. Each of us has a responsibility to our ratepayers, our taxpayers, our voters. My interest and the interest of every one of the 32 members in opposition is every bit as legitimate in terms of getting information about how this government plans, how this government implements, and how this government does its business. It simply represents a gross misunderstanding of the role that each one of us has in this House to hear that kind of suggestion from the minister.

You know, it strikes me, Mr. Speaker, and I say this with respect, that one would have thought that a key representative in a government committed to openness and accountability would have come forward and said: "Mr. Speaker, we have a problem with this motion. We think it should be amended because some of the material here isn't readily available. There are bona fide, legitimate reasons why that can't be shared with all members in an open fashion." I would have been prepared to accept those kinds of qualifications and then deal with that part that the government could reveal, but the government doesn't come in with that sort of constructive approach.

Point of Order Tabling Cited Documents

DR. WEST: Point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. minister is rising on a point of order.

DR. WEST: Well, now I'm going to use the force of parliamentary procedure to end this debate. I brought out in the debate, as a kindness to the opposition, 446 of *Beauchesne* to make my point. Now there's going to be a debate ad nauseam in here contrair to the point of order that I'm going to raise now: 446 directs me as a minister and gives me full out not to submit this information. I would like your reading on that. Why would we go on ad nauseam on something that is contrair to parliamentary procedure?

3:10

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I don't see how it can conceivably be contrair to parliamentary procedure that we would ask for information and that he would not give it to us. In fact, quite the contrary. If he reads 446 properly, what it says is that any kind

of documentation that is ever utilized to influence debate in this House would have to be tabled.

Now, I can't tell you how many times we have heard the minister or the Premier or others stand up in the House and say that we have to let the free market determine what's going to happen to liquor prices. Well, we'd like to see what document he's using to demonstrate that somehow the free market will establish prices that aren't going to be higher than what they already were. He said that prices wouldn't go up. We'd like to see the business plan that underlines his argument that somehow they were going to maintain the same level of revenue to government after privatization that they did before privatization. I think, Mr. Speaker, that he's on very, very thin ice, that in fact we could argue very strongly under this very point in *Beauchesne* that because he has used that kind of information in debate in this Legislature, he has an obligation to table any documents that underline the points that he made in debate. I've just mentioned two of them; there were many others. We would certainly hope and we would expect that a minister of his stature would actually have documentation to back up the kinds of claims that he made about privatization of ALCB, claims that he made before us all in this Legislature.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I think if we're going to do selective quoting out of *Beauchesne*, it's only appropriate that 446 be quoted the rest of the way. It says:

(2) The following criteria are to be applied in determining if the government papers or documents should be exempt from production. It goes on almost through the whole alphabet. I would like to point out specifically (g), where it says:

Papers of a voluminous character or which would require an inordinate cost or length of time to prepare.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that most of the motions for returns would fill up their wheelbarrow if they were adhered to. I think the minister should be commended for offering to give out the document at an appropriate time. If hon. members across the way would only take the trouble to read *Beauchesne* sections in their totality, I think we would avoid a lot of frivolous requests on the motions for returns.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, you know, much has been made of *Beauchesne* 446. The reality is that *Beauchesne* 446 refers to a proposition set out by the federal government in 1973. What we've seen since 1973 is the advent of freedom of information legislation in almost every jurisdiction in this country that goes further, vastly further than these rules. If the government in fact believes in openness and accountability, the way they show us is not by retreating beyond the four walls of a position paper outlined in the House of Commons in 1973 but really by embracing openness and accountability by sharing information with us in this Chamber and sharing it now.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I, too, am rising in support of this motion. I'm quite amazed at . . .

MR. SPEAKER: I think we'll deal with the point of order, hon. member.

MR. MITCHELL: I spoke on the point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: You did, but the Chair hasn't ruled on the point of order.

The Chair does not believe that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs can shut down the debate on this motion based on that citation of *Beauchesne*. It's open to the hon. minister to accept the motion or reject it. He's made a choice there. It's open to him to speak in support and explanation of his decision for what he's done. There's nothing in our Standing Orders or *Beauchesne* that says that the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud can't be fully debated as is now being done.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm now speaking to the motion for a return.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Same speech. It doesn't matter now.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, it's going to be slightly different, I think. I was originally thinking that under the new commitment of this government to openness, its commitment somewhat restated by the Premier today to freedom of information, a motion for a return of this nature would be a given, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would simply say: "Yes, I appreciate the request, and I will answer that request within days of today. Just give me some time to get the information together." But you know, I am very, very concerned now with what I hear the minister saying today: he is proceeding and we're not going to get a report until he's finished and he'll write that report. I'm particularly concerned about that given the statement by the Deputy Premier that, really, information under the freedom of information Act won't be retroactive. So what this means is that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is moving with haste to get privatization of registries and the ALCB finished before the freedom of information Act is passed in the Legislature. Then all of that information will be retroactive to that Act, and given the Deputy Premier's statement, there'll be no legislative requirement for the minister to indicate to us exactly what could have happened . . .

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

DR. WEST: Point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs rising on a point of order?

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker, under 23(h) and (i). This is a little more serious. I mean, we laugh a lot of times in this Assembly, but the hon. member has made an allegation that I have done this in order to avoid an Act that's coming before this Assembly. I would like an apology on that because that is absolutely a false allegation against this minister. There was absolutely no intent on my part in the debate or otherwise to avoid any Act that might be law in this province or might bring forth a situation where we would be submitting certain information. I find it reprehensible that some member could do that in this Assembly.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I apologize if the member has felt that I have impugned his motives. I will take his indignation as a commitment on his behalf that regardless of what that freedom of information legislation says about retroactivity, if it says that information wouldn't be provided retroactively, it will not apply in his case. Because he feels so strongly that I have

impugned his motives, suggesting that somehow he would like to beat the legislation so he wouldn't have to provide information, it seems to me that that's a de facto commitment that he will provide information retroactively regardless of what that piece of legislation says. I put that on the record because I accept him at face value. I accept his word and his commitment.

Point of Order Relevance

MRS. BLACK: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. BLACK: *Beauchesne* 459, Mr. Speaker. The debate was really on the motion that came forward. The motion referred to privatization as the government, not on the focus on Municipal Affairs only. I don't understand why we're going off onto tracks of future legislation coming down and commitments in the future. I would like to see us focus on the motion that was put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, if we might.

3:20

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has raised a valid point: really we are debating this motion and not freedom of information and right to privacy legislation.

DR. WEST: On the point of order . . .

MR. MITCHELL: The Speaker has ruled. You can't now speak on the point of order. We have to accept the Speaker's rulings.

The only reason I raised that particular point, Mr. Speaker, of course is because it was raised in the context of the minister's debate.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: I would get back to Motion 165. My point is that there are some very significant questions that need to be answered – and they could be answered, Mr. Speaker – about the privatization of the ALCB. They could easily be answered if we could see not a pile of documents but simply a business plan. If we could see a business plan undoubtedly developed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs before he proceeded with privatization . . .

Point of Order Relevance

DR. WEST: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. minister is rising on a point of order.

DR. WEST: I appreciate that so many points of order on a motion seems to be tiresome, but I'm going to talk to relevancy again. This motion that's before us is targeted literally to 17 departments. It's targeted to the government. It doesn't specify ALCB or the Minister of Municipal Affairs or anything else. I have taken the question and rejected it, but when you get to the debate like this, to keep focusing on the Minister of Municipal Affairs when this Motion 165 is so broad that it covers 17 departments – I would say that this motion should be rejected by the House because it isn't relevant to the debate or relevant to anything. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. If Motion 165 does affect 17 different departments of government, well then to the Chair that is an argument for a fairly wide-ranging debate.

The Chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: I would like to get back to my argument, which concerns the ALCB, the fact that there must be a business plan, unless the minister suggested I'm impugning his motives by suggesting that there would be a business plan. We want to believe that there is a business plan, and we want to believe that it would begin to explain to us some of the very interesting policy decisions that we have seen with respect to the ALCB privatization.

For example, we'd like to see in the business plan how the government concluded that the \$400 million to \$500 million in annual revenue that the government receives from the ALCB would be sustained under the new privatization program. That undoubtedly would be on the revenue side of any business plan that would be done with respect to the Alberta Liquor Control Board privatization. We'd like to see how the business plan laid out that private liquor concerns in this province would be able to provide service at least as good as the service that we had within the financial parameters established by government. What do I mean by that? Well, when the government withdrew from liquor retailing and liquor wholesaling, they said that they left \$67 million of expenses. They want to maintain their revenue, their income, of \$400 million to \$500 million after expenses, so they have to get that from private liquor stores. They reduced their own government expenses by \$67 million. Well, if prices aren't to go up – and they said they weren't going to go up – and you have revenue on this side that can't change, and you have prices on this side that can't change, what you have in the middle for the private sector is \$67 million. That has to cover their expenses and provide profit for the private sector. Clearly, a business plan – that's all we're asking for – would outline how it is that liquor could be delivered across this province in an efficient way with a quality service with \$67 million for expenses and profit for the private-sector liquor concerns. The minister also said that he couldn't provide this information because it might jeopardize certain elements, which is what he was talking about. Well, we'd like to see in the business plan whether or not they assumed that Safeway would be allowed to get into the liquor business or that major commercial concerns, particularly food concerns like Safeway, would be allowed to get into the liquor business. Because, of course, that would underline to us whether or not they made a commitment to smaller entrepreneurs that Safeway wouldn't be allowed to get in. What we saw several weeks ago was a real flipping and flopping by the Premier over whether or not Safeway would be allowed to be in. When you begin to analyze that, you have to think why Safeway wouldn't be in if it's a free market, unless the government had made a commitment to a number of smaller entrepreneurs that Safeway wouldn't be allowed in because that would damage their competitive advantage. We'd like to see in a business plan whether the Safeway participation or participation by corporations of the nature of Safeway was allowed or not allowed, was accounted for or not accounted for.

We would like to see, Mr. Speaker, in that business plan whether there was a line that said, "Cap beer prices." It came out of the blue a number of weeks after the ALCB was privatized and after much to-do was made by the government about how prices weren't going to go up. Then all of a sudden the Premier

said: let's cap beer prices. Now, we'd have to know whether that was in the business plan or whether in fact that was an afterthought that wasn't particularly well planned. What we saw throughout this experience was the government saying one thing one day, flipping the next day, or even slipping the same day. In fact, it reminded me of that old line about weather in Alberta: if you don't like it, wait five minutes. I think we can apply the same thing to liquor policy in Alberta: if you don't like it, wait five minutes because the Premier will change his mind.

So what we're trying to say is that privatization is a central policy of this government, and one of its much touted privatization initiatives was the Liquor Control Board. There are many unanswered questions, many questions about why it is that it unfolded the way it did. We'd simply like to see the documentation that drove that liquor policy, that drove the privatization policy to see whether some of these questions were anticipated and to see whether they are in fact answered in what must surely have been a well-conceived, well-prepared, well-researched business plan. It is striking to me, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would have gone to such lengths to avoid providing us that small piece of information that could be so illuminating about the kinds of questions that I've raised.

We would like to see, Mr. Speaker, I guess in the final analysis, whether in that kind of business plan it was suggested that we should cap beer prices and whether that might set a precedent for whether we should cap kindergarten prices, whether we should cap health care user fees, whether we should cap user fees that can be charged for physiotherapy, whether we can cap housing for seniors when it's likely that that will be privatized, or whether it's simply a business initiative, an initiative under the ALCB privatization policy that beer prices would be capped.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 165 is broad by design. It asks for a variety of information from a variety of sources. Part of that is due to, I guess, the experience of members on this side of the House with privatizations that have gone on in the past. You recall that a number of years ago the government undertook the privatization of AGT. At that time we were invited by the then Premier to ask for information, to put it on the Order Paper and ask for studies and ask for documents that showed that privatizing AGT would in fact be a good step. So this particular member did that, and other members of the opposition did ask for documentation to be provided to the House and therefore to the Alberta public that showed that these privatizations were in fact a step in the right direction.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that the government managed to successfully divest itself of AGT. Notice I didn't say that they successfully made a profit on AGT. I said that they divested themselves of AGT. In fact, the government conveniently overlooked, until we ended up \$645 million in the hole, the other part of AGT called NovAtel, despite the fact that we asked for information ahead of time. The response we got at that time was: well, we can't give out that information because of conflicts with business and it would be unfair business practice. I believe the minister at that time stood up and gave quotations again under 446, citing I think in particular section (e), because I've got it highlighted in my book as having been referred to on a number of times, and also section (n). But the fact of the matter is that although we sold off AGT – some of it at an interest-free rate for

a year, so some people got a great deal – most Albertans on the other hand took a bath on NovAtel. The end result is that we got rid of the whole thing and ended up with nothing for it.

AN HON. MEMBER: And Telus is trading at 17 and a half.

MR. BRUSEKER: Telus is trading at 17 and a half, and the people that bought into it are doing really well. Unfortunately that's not the average Alberta taxpayer. The average Alberta taxpayer ended up getting rid of a phone company and has nothing to show for it.

So now, Mr. Speaker, what we find ourselves in is a government that now has – and the Minister Of Municipal Affairs has responded to this question in the negative. Of course, in his particular department we had the recent privatization of ALCB. When that announcement was made, it was made with the undertaking that we would make money on it, and it would be revenue neutral for the province. Unfortunately, we now see that that's not been the case, and my hon. colleague from Edmonton-McClung has dealt with that already.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Municipal Affairs was kind enough to point out that in fact this affects all 17 government departments. The interesting word here that really, I guess, is being overlooked by the government – this is the last portion of the motion for a return. It says:

pertaining to the privatization of the delivery of government operations that can be handled more effectively by the private sector.

Well, there's an assumption by this government based on what we've seen with the privatization of AGT and ALCB and who knows what's coming next that the private sector can handle everything. In fact, when we read the most recent manifesto that they're following here called *Unfinished Business*, they talk about privatization as being the only answer. They talk, in fact, about privatizing schools, commercializing schools. I believe one of the ministers over there has even talked about making our correctional institutions privatized. Now, I can just imagine how that would work. I happen to have four correctional institutions in my constituency, and I can just imagine them throwing them open as a theme hotel and inviting people to come and stay for a night in the brand-new remand centre. Come on out and experience the opportunity to stay in the remand centre. I'm sure that an operator would love to have that opportunity and people have the doors clanging behind them. I'm not sure where these people get their ideas, Mr. Speaker, but I would suggest that probably wouldn't be a real money-making kind of venture. If we were to buy into the concept that privatization is good regardless, which seems to be the basic mind-set of this government, then I can understand their concern.

I guess the problem is that I get the impression that there are only one or two conclusions that can be made, since the minister has rejected the request of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud. That is either (a) there is no documentation, there are no studies, and they're simply flying willy-nilly along until they find an opportunity that smacks them in the eyes and they say, "Gee, this looks like a good idea; let's privatize this and sell it off," much as they did with Syncrude here just a few short months ago, or a portion of Syncrude at any rate. The other alternative is that they've got so many things going on and they've got so many different concepts that they know are not going to fly that they would be embarrassed to release those papers. Either one of those options, I would suggest, is rather frightening. I'm sure there are some ridiculous ideas out there. I've already pointed out some of them.

Mr. Speaker, it's frustrating when you get a government that says: yes, we are going to provide you with all kinds of informa-

tion. The ministers say that they would be happy to provide you with the report but not today, basically is what his answer said.

The difficulty I have in supporting the motion to reject this, as put forward by the minister, I guess is that quite frankly Albertans have a right to know where it is this government is going with respect to privatization. This government didn't campaign on that in 1993. They didn't say that we're going to turn around and sell off this, that, and the other kind of thing, yet they have pursued that philosophy I think to the detriment of Albertans.

So what we are saying is: before anything more happens, give us some information that shows us, persuade us that your proposals will indeed be handled more effectively by the private sector. More effectively, I would take to mean, would be to the benefit of all Alberta taxpayers. That's what we're asking for, and the government is saying: no, we're not going to tell the taxpayer what it is we're planning on doing. The phrase has been used before, Mr. Speaker, and it seems to be continuing along. This is the most secretive government in the country, and perhaps this particular minister is vying for the most secretive minister in that government. I'm not sure.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I originally had not intended to speak to this particular motion as I know that my hon. colleagues have it well in hand. But in listening to the debate, especially with reference to what the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has been saying, it has brought me to my feet.

When one looks at the motion, it sounds to me as a motion that a government who believes in freedom of information would be more than willing to bring in, even if it meant wheelbarrows of information that would be brought in through these doors. It says that it's looking for documents from January 1, 1993, to February 10, 1994. It's a very defined period, and during that time period there have not been legions of privatization that we know of in this particular Assembly. If there are legions of privatization that have happened, then it would be worthy for the hon. ministers involved, if there are indeed 17 ministers involved, to inform the Assembly of the privatizations that have occurred. The privatizations to date that we know of look at instances such as ALCB, look at instances such as registries, which has occurred without the full endorsement of this particular House and leads towards an example of the kind of privatization that we might be looking at with respect to areas such as the employment standards branch and the mediation branch within the Department of Labour.

Now, from looking at the motion and looking at 446, again it does not look to me as if we have been unreasonable in our request, and the Speaker has as well ruled on that in favour of the particular motion. I believe the employees of these particular areas that have been privatized have a right to know whether there were in fact any plans and what the plans were for privatization. I believe Albertans have a right to know because what is in essence happening as a result of the privatization efforts on behalf of this government is that we are looking at increased prices in liquor. We are looking at increased prices with regards to land title searches. I don't know how many of you have received calls from your constituents, but I know that we have been getting calls from constituents who say, "It used to cost \$3.50 to do a land titles search, and now it costs \$20." I wonder whether that was part of the plan.

I think the Legislative Assembly has the right to know. If it is indeed a document that is secretive, then do the members who are not ministers really have an understanding as to what the effect of privatization is and what the details were that went into privatization?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung spoke to the matter of business plans and whether there are any business plans. I think what we need to look at is what were a part of the business plans with regards to profit and loss statements that the government is putting forward.

I think these are simple requests. These are requests that fall under the umbrella of freedom of information that, it's my understanding from question period today, the government caucus is fully behind. There is no split – am I right? – with regards to freedom of information.

3:40

AN HON. MEMBER: Wrong.

MS LEIBOVICI: So given all of those . . . Oh, it's wrong? There is a split in caucus? Well, what is it? Is it right or is it wrong? Is there a split in caucus on freedom of information? Let's find out. Let the people of Alberta find out. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

AN HON. MEMBER: What are you worried about?

MS LEIBOVICI: Because I'm representing . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Through the Chair. [interjections] Order please. If hon. members would make their contributions to the Assembly through the Chair, we would avoid atmospheres like this.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Very wise, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Just to sidetrack, if I may, Mr. Speaker. There was a comment made as to the representation on this side of the House, and I would like to remind the members on the other side of the House again that 40 percent of the population of Alberta did vote for the members on this side of the House, and I think that's something that the members on the other side need to remember.

Again, it's a very simple request. It's a very open request. It's a request that seems to fall in line with this government's image of wanting to have open government. It would help in understanding the various privatization efforts that the government is planning to embark on from February 10, 1994, onwards, and frankly I find it hard to believe this government would refuse such a request.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 165 would give a government that was truly interested in openness and accountability an opportunity to let Albertans know, to let all of us know on what basis they are making decisions to transfer services to the private sector that were once provided by government. The very notion of privatization is that services that are paid for by taxpayers, who have supported the development of these services, are now going to be delivered in a new and different way. All Motion 165 does is ask the government to come clean, to be accountable, and to tell those taxpayers what it is that they are planning to do with those taxpayer dollars and those taxpayer services.

Now, if the Minister of Municipal Affairs has difficulty in deciding which documents and which papers would offend *Beauchesne* 446, then I would suggest that all he would have to

do is provide an inventory to this Assembly of all the papers, all the documents, all the contracts, and then this Assembly can debate which of those inventory documents and contracts and papers would offend 446 and which wouldn't. We're not at all interested in the hon. minister's fan mail or his hate mail or any other kind of mail that he has. We don't care about his personal correspondence or his personal records. What we're interested in, Mr. Speaker, are the facts as they pertain to government services and taxpayer dollars. Albertans deserve no less, and any minister of the Crown should be no less forthcoming than that and tell members of this Assembly and all Albertans what it is they've got in mind, what it is they're doing to our services and to the programs that Albertans have come to depend on. Motion 165 is a first small step in this government telling the truth to Albertans about what they've got in mind for the future and for the services and for the tax dollars.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to close debate on this motion.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to close debate on this motion by making a number of points. The first is in reference to comments by the hon. minister. It is fair to say that the government holds all the cards, all 52, and in a sense for us to request a particular document, if we could request the document we wanted, we'd have to name it specifically. I mean, if we could do that, we'd probably have it in our possession in any case. It's a real problem. By their very nature the motions for returns tend to be a bit broad.

In rejecting this, my hon. colleague from Calgary-North West said that it led one to the observation that there were only two reasons they might do it: (a) they were doing so much that they couldn't provide the material, or (b) they had no material. I think there's also another one of course. The motion says that could "be handled . . . effectively by the private sector." Perhaps there are none that effectively could be handled by the private sector. I for one believe that cannot be the case, but certainly by rejecting the motion, they leave all three options open for speculation.

I think it is fair to say, in terms of privatization, that we ought to know what the structure of the plan is. What is the business plan? Because that will provide a sense of security. It will provide a framework from which the private sector can assess what the rules of the game are. I think what we saw, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the ALCB and with respect to corporate registries is that the rules of the game changed each day as they found new problems emerging. By providing a business plan in advance of privatization, what it does is then allow one to find the problems that may emerge. So what we would like to see and what this motion, open-ended as it is, requests is the information that would allow us to see the planning process that led to the privatization of various entities. It's not a request for everything, and the hon. minister had alluded to the fact that he had the discretion, if he chose to, to provide certain material and not others because it would infringe upon cabinet privilege.

Well, I respect that decision, but I think there are some government documents that could be provided that in fact do not infringe upon cabinet secrecy. I think it would be useful for those to be provided for the House and also for Albertans to see the nature of the planning process that has gone into privatization. The hon. minister in rejecting this motion has again highlighted the problem that an opposition faces or that Albertans face in terms of getting information. Certainly this makes me all the more positive about the need, then, for subsequent privatization

initiatives to require a business plan to be provided, to require some structure for the privatization process. We are indeed fortunate that there's a Bill coming down the road, Mr. Speaker, Bill 205, that requests that. That's just a slight plug for a forthcoming Bill. It would then preclude debates such as this, because that information would be public, that which hon. ministers felt could not be made public because it would infringe upon certain discussions in cabinet would not be part of it, and we would not then be requesting on an open-ended basis such material because we would be receiving in advance, tabled in the Legislature or published in the *Alberta Gazette*, information about the business plans, information about the process of privatization, information about the tendering process for the liquidation of assets. There would be a stable planning environment. The private sector would know the rules of the game governing the market.

That's really what we ask. We ask for stability. Certainly many small businessmen have come to us and have said: "We wanted to invest in corporate registries, but the rules changed every day. We wanted to invest in the ALCB, but the rules changed every day." So we're doing this in a sense to ensure that that doesn't happen. We're acting in a sense as honest brokers for this government, because on occasion, Mr. Speaker, they sometimes don't know what is in their best interests, and releasing such information, I do believe, is in their best interests and certainly in the best interests of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, all those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion fails. Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:50 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

4:00

For the motion:

Beniuk	Henry	Sapers
Bruseker	Hewes	Sekulic
Carlson	Kirkland	Soetaert
Collingwood	Langevin	Van Binsbergen
Dalla-Longa	Leibovici	Vasseur
Decore	Massey	White
Dickson	Mitchell	Zariwny
Germain	Nicol	Zwozdesky
Hanson	Percy	

Against the motion:

Ady	Forsyth	Mirosh
Amery	Friedel	Oberg
Black	Fritz	Paszkowski
Brassard	Gordon	Pham
Burgener	Haley	Rostad
Calahasen	Havelock	Severtson
Cardinal	Hierath	Smith

Clegg	Hlady	Sohal
Coutts	Jacques	Stelmach
Day	Kowalski	Tannas
Dinning	Laing	Taylor, L.
Doerksen	Lund	Thurber
Dunford	Mar	West
Evans	McClellan	Woloshyn
Fischer	McFarland	

Totals: For – 26 Against – 44

[Motion lost]

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

Bill 202

Alberta Task Force on Education Act

[Debate adjourned February 12: Mr. Severtson speaking]

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I finished speaking yesterday, I was mentioning that it's government's plan, through the Minister of Education, to cut down the number of school boards from 140 to 60. This is to be done to reduce overlap and duplication and also to cut back on the amount of administration so we can keep money down in the classroom.

The separate school boards of this province will continue to be an asset to the education system. This government has every intention of honouring its constitutional obligations. The separate school boards will continue within our education system and will not be amalgamated with public school boards.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 is a duplication of the consultation process that has gone on for several years. This Bill is basically a Bill to delay the process. I often wonder what has happened to the Leader of the Opposition's calculator which he carried around throughout the province last May and June, when he was trying to explain how the growing deficit was increasing day by day, hour by hour, by the minute and that he would cut brutally, cut \$1.3 billion the first year of budget cutting. When the Minister of Education comes forward with a three-year plan, he counters with Bill 202, which again will delay.

If we did pass Bill 202, it would take at least two years before we could implement any recommendations from Bill 202. First of all, it would take to the end of March before the Bill was passed, and then it would take another month before the committee could at least be formed and 18 months to make its report. Now we're talking in the neighbourhood of the end of October, November. This report would have to be brought to the Legislature and then debated. So we're talking, ladies and gentlemen, members of the Legislature, sometime in the fall of '95, most likely in the spring of 1996, before we could even act on reducing spending in education.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Without cutting spending or increasing taxes and not reducing the \$239 million it's proposed to cut from education, the interest on that debt, \$239 million at 5.5 percent, would amount to another \$27 million that we'd have to find or we'd be losing that would go to education just by implementing a process of this nature. What is disturbing about this is the fact that the Minister

of Education has already carried on a two-year consultation with various stakeholders and Albertans throughout the province. This Bill is nothing more than a delay.

Bill 208 will retard the restructuring process. The aims of the budget cutting are not only to save money but to create a better quality of education for the future generations by reducing the waste and inefficiencies. We can better utilize the funds that are available through a more equitable tax policy which is laid out so students in all parts of the province can have the same access to education funding no matter where they live in the province.

I'd urge, ladies and gentlemen, that this Assembly vote no to Bill 202.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I feel privileged to rise today to present a few quick points here on Bill 202, the Alberta Task Force on Education Act, with a view to try to encourage and perhaps influence members opposite to find it in their infinite wisdom to go along with us and vote in support of this Bill.

Why we need a task force to study something like education is the question. The answer, of course, is because we feel that until you have done a thorough and accurate and open and honest assessment of what education really is all about in this province, you ought not embark on any knee-jerk type of plans to try and fix it. This is what an education task force would allow to happen. We know that it's a world now that is evershrinking in terms of our ability to communicate with each other, that there's a global village taking place, that opportunities ought to be there for our young people, and that job competitiveness is at the forefront of every discussion. We know these things, yet I wonder what it is that we're doing about it to help these young people as they go forward.

A task force on education would help us develop a sensible strategy based on an all-party committee which would also include members of all levels of education, include individuals from the business community, from the labour force, from the general community, and other involved constituents. This kind of a task force would be based on and would have as its central purpose for a vision of education to develop, not something that simply takes us through a three-year business planning process. It would be founded on very sound principles aimed at helping all Albertans gain good education for the long run, develop the proper learning habits, and make sure that information is provided on a fair and equitable basis to all who require it. To go any other direction but that, I would submit to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a challenge to the ideology of what education ought to be all about, and that is that we want to provide channels for our students to explore as much information as they feel is necessary to make challenging decisions of the future. That ideology is not to control what will be learned or in what quantities. That ideology through a task force like this would probably yield the answer that has buoyed us to this stage. They are our future leaders, and we owe it to them to present as comprehensive and fair a system as possible.

I know that as we look at what's going on in higher education circles, we're starting to lose students. We're starting to see enrolments curtailed. I think an education task force would help that level as well. No one has said that some thoughtful streamlining and cost cutting isn't necessary across the broader spectrum of the budget, but I would submit that education is one that you simply cannot plough ahead with the ruthlessness that we are seeing. You can't rush these things when it is as complex and as

important an issue as education is. Look at what happened with the rushed, hurried approach with regard to ALCB privatization. There was something that wasn't broken, didn't necessarily need fixing. We see tremendous losses. We see all kinds of other havoc having been created and more yet to come, I'm sure.

4:10

I want to just say quickly, Mr. Speaker, that as a former schoolteacher myself I think a task force would also help dispel some of the many unfortunate rumours and myths and other untruths that are being thrown at schoolteachers today, as they were sometime over the last number of years as well. It's commonly thought by many people that teachers have a job that starts at 8:30 and ends at 3:30. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. We have teachers on both sides of the House who can attest to that. Teachers are frequently not given the proper credit for the great amount of additional work that they do with regard to coaching – I don't care if it's the debating club or the sports club or choirs or drama productions or what it is – with regard also to counseling and tutoring, marking and preparing for classes, attending community meetings, consultations with parents, professional upgrading, and all kinds of other things that they as teachers do to make their jobs more effective. This is all part of it, but it doesn't show up in the 9 to 5 scenario. Quite frequently teachers are wrongly labeled as being people who just leave the job at 3:30. Nothing is further from the truth, as I said. I think an education task force would allow us to address some of those kinds of myths.

An education task force is necessary at this stage especially, I think, because the current Klein government seems to have lost the trust of Albertans concerned with education. We see this with the fears out there. We see this with the tremendous number of letters and faxes and phone calls, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We see this with the challenges to the constitutionality of some of the moves. We see it with all kinds of examples, yet we aren't doing enough about it. So that trust must be regained not just for the government on the other side but for Albertans who believe in the tremendous importance of education.

We need the task force to also dispel and curtail the fears that have been created by the other side. I know that there have been some false statements made in this House regarding some fear mongering. Well, I'll tell you that I think the fear mongering is happening as a result of the activities on the other side. I'm not proud to say that, because I don't favour that tactic no matter where it comes from, but I do think that fear has been created. Fear and uncertainty and all kinds of insecurities exist in the people of Alberta who are trying to fight off this assault on education.

We also need a task force to fight off this attempt to centralize and take over control in a Big Brother fashion. We see that with the centralizing of the property tax issues. We see that with the need for this government, it feels, to appoint superintendents as opposed to having them be elected, which has been customarily the case.

We need this task force to create some hope for these young people now that there is a reason to stay in school, that there is a reason to continue with more education, to encourage them that education is a life-learning skill. We have to make sure that information is provided to them in the fullest and broadest sense. Education is not simply the three Rs. Education is far too important to be rushed, railroaded, and ruined. There are three Rs for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I would suggest that we do take a look at bringing in something like this task force. This is an opportunity for us to get

back on track. I don't think that when we're listening to people, we should only be listening to New Zealanders. I think we need to listen to what Albertans are saying. They're not only saying it, but they're showing it. We seem to have a government that isn't responding, at least quickly enough, to those kinds of needs.

I also make a quick point here that I think has to be flushed out with regard to private school funding so that parents choosing that type of scholastic upbringing for their children can feel that there's a greater parity than presently exists. I think a properly conducted, fully public, open, consultative process such as this Bill would allow to happen is necessary to flush out that issue as well.

I recall some stories about what happened in rural Saskatchewan 20 years ago when they rushed through a system that saw the schools in many of the rural areas, Mr. Deputy Speaker, being closed down. What happened is that those particular rural communities ceased to attract more families, more businesses because the schools had left. In the final analysis, what happened is that those rural communities dried up, disappeared, and we saw the gradual demise of a system that otherwise had served quite well. I don't want to see that happen in Alberta, and I would hope that the government opposite would see this education task force as being a preventative measure in this regard.

It seems that a lot of what's happening here, Mr. Speaker, is driving more students out of the classrooms and into the streets as they run away from a moment of despair. They're the people who are becoming our social service cases of the future. We must do whatever we can to give them hope, to protect them from having that fate befall them. We must show them that we care, that we are concerned, that education is far too important an investment, that it is something that rounds out the individual in a global sense and helps them. We must do everything we can to speak up on their behalf. There will be a rally coming up here, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think it's tomorrow. The students will be seeking some support for this. What better way to show them that we are concerned than to say, "It's so important that we're creating a task force to look into this matter, and we're looking into it right now."

In government lingo, so that members opposite will understand, let me put this in summation this way. It's far cheaper to buoy the system with proper support now than to let it collapse and try to rebuild it from scratch later. We cannot continue to evaluate everything only on the basis of a financial bottom line. Young people enrolled and about to be enrolled in our school system are young individuals whom you must look at as students. Stop treating and looking at them only as customers. That is not what we're wanting in education.

In conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would seriously urge all the members opposite to make good on a promise that even their own Premier made in his election campaign material, where he said that he was committed to increasing the importance of education and possibly increasing the support for it. This would be a good way to flush out more of the points in that regard.

I thank you for listening to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having laboured long and arduously in the vineyard of education, I would like to contribute to this debate, and I would like to speak in favour of the proposed task force. As an educator I've often found that we were left dangling in the breeze because of all kinds of newfangled inventions that were coming down the pipe.

[interjections] I think the member opposite will have his turn later if he so desires.

Anyway, it is time that we take stock of what is important these days and which way we ought to go and how we ought to prepare our students for, as is always that vaunted expression, entrance into the next century. I'm a little disappointed when I'm listening to the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and he accuses us of wanting to retard progress, when in fact all we're looking for is to establish a task force which would provide the government truly with a mandate for structural changes, which they thus far haven't had.

I think the point has been made several times over that nowhere, Mr. Speaker, in the roundtable discussions or anywhere else has anyone suggested that the superintendent ought to be appointed by Alberta Education. No one has suggested, I think, that funding ought to be assumed totally by Alberta Ed to the tune of an extra 1 and a quarter billion dollars. No one, other than one person from Red Deer, advanced the cause of charter schools. Perhaps it is a good idea – who knows? – but let us canvas the Alberta population and see what they think. Thus far they don't know what to think because they've been taken by surprise, just as we have.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is terribly important that we have that task force. I would urge the members on the opposite side to see the wisdom of having this kind of a basis for making structural changes and to forget about this unseemly haste with which the present changes are being introduced. Again, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake made the point that the government is attempting to make cuts away from the classroom. He obviously doesn't realize that ECS is being taught in a classroom, and it's now being halved. I mean, that is a classroom. He doesn't seem to realize that transportation grants have been eliminated entirely for those kids. That means they can't get to the classroom unless somebody drives them. The program unit grants have been cut and will be cut by 15 percent by the time the government is through. That will hit kids. I don't know where he or other hon. members think these cuts are going to hit. I mean, you can only cut out so many middlemen, so many boards, so many superintendents.

4:20

It is a fact, Mr. Speaker, that when these cuts have been implemented, the size of each classroom will increase. I know several schools in my jurisdiction that already have had the word; principals have had the word that they will have to drop two, three, four staff members. I hope members opposite realize that that translates into larger classes. I'm also warning members opposite that when September rolls around, they will really find out what Albertans think. They could avoid that by supporting us in our venture to establish a task force. Even a former minister of education, whose name of course I can't mention here, branded the government's efforts as stumbling through darkness, and I thought that he put it particularly aptly.

Clearly there's a need to stop and think before we leap, before we plunge into that utter darkness. The last task force – I think the point has been made before – dates back to 1972, when the Worth report saw the light and established the direction for the next 20 years, as it turns out, to take. We have to re-establish what is important, and we need to find out what indeed Albertans want.

Now, there is need for improvement of the public school system, and I include the separate school system as well, Mr. Speaker. Again, speaking from experience, I can certainly go along with that. I think it is time that we establish what it is that

Albertans want us to teach in our schools, and we have to establish how Albertans want us to teach it, because I think they ought to have quite a say in the matter.

Finally, on the matter of evaluation, it is extremely important that parents have a say in that too. Of course, the government agrees with that because they favour charter schools in which parents would have a far greater say, and of course parents would determine exactly those things.

How it should be financed I think is another item that is important to look at. Should we go with a package of basic courses and the rest being options? All these things. The government keeps talking about basic education, but we don't really know what it is. I've seen physical education included, and I've seen it excluded. I personally would like to put in there a whole group of languages, but I think others might not be in agreement with that. It is important, Mr. Speaker, to establish all that.

I would finally submit that a task force of this nature will provide us with a map to make these changes, to follow those lines of innovations. It allows us to do the restructuring on a basis that is totally different and orderly rather than as we know happened in the matter of liquor sales.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would urge members on the opposite side, those who can see the light of reasoning, to join us in supporting Bill 202.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and good afternoon. The debate on Bill 202 has been rather interesting, and I'm glad to add my own observations.

West Yellowhead has just indicated that teachers have been left dangling in the past, and I just have to wonder aloud where the teachers were during the past consultations that have been taking place throughout the province the last number of months. I know in our riding the teachers themselves initiated a lot of the local roundtables in which I took part, and I was happy to have them there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill is modeled after the 1972 Worth commission, a commission that cost the province over \$455,000. The original order in council stated that it could not exceed \$300,000. At least the individuals who drafted the Worth commission had the foresight to put a cap on the spending limit, but this Bill, as proposed by the Leader of the Official Opposition, opens up the gate to a wide, 18-month spending spree. This spending spree seems to be what the opposition likes to do best. They've spent a mere \$222,000 renovating their offices.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. McFARLAND: Two hundred and twenty-two thousand dollars on office improvements, and if . . . [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. We'd like to hear from Little Bow, please.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's clear to me that if the opposition isn't able to be thrifty in their own closet, I don't know how they can be expected to be thrifty with the public purse. This commission will likely cost the people of Alberta more than \$200,000, which is the amount that they spent on their cellular phones and desks. If, as the opposition claims,

this committee will model itself after the Worth commission, it will likely cost the province millions.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is that on top of their offices?

MR. McFARLAND: Yeah, the \$200,000 is on top of their office renovation.

I mentioned the cost of the Worth commission at \$455,000, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1972 dollars. If that were translated into today's dollars, the cost would have been nearly \$2.5 billion. Now, that's over 2 million new dollars that would be spent on consultations which have already taken place across this province. I wonder if it could be that the Liberals expected to use the \$2.5 million that they wished to save by reducing the number of MLAs to pay for the commission. At least at the end of the day if both Bills passed, the province wouldn't be any poorer.

Edmonton-Avonmore mentioned that there have been unfortunate rumours and myths that teachers have received over the past months, and I just question, seeing as how I haven't dispelled any of these or passed on any rumours, if maybe the Liberal caucus is the one initiating the rumours and the myths.

However, the biggest problem that I have with Bill 202 is the time frame. This commission wouldn't report back to the Legislature for an additional 18 months, but what does the opposition intend to do for the government as far as the deficit is concerned? This government has continually tried to impress upon the opposition the need to reduce spending. We can't afford the delay for another two years. Yet this Bill as proposed under section 2(3) would see a minimum of 14 members, six of which would come directly from the teaching profession, another two from organized labour, and we're expected to have a nonpartisan recommendation coming from eight out of the 14 members.

I'd also like to point out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the task force is given carte blanche when it comes to soliciting the services of counsel, clerks, reporters, and assistants in the wording under section 7(3).

The Task Force may engage the services of

- (a) counsel, clerks, reporters and assistants, and
- (b) experts, persons having special technical or other knowledge or any other qualified person.

It seems to me a pretty open-ended task force.

Edmonton-Avonmore also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, indicated that he felt superintendents shouldn't be appointed, and I have two points that I would like to bring out here. The superintendents have not been appointed and would not be appointed other than as a mere technicality, because it's my understanding that the local boards would be solicited and encouraged to help select their own superintendents.

Edmonton-Avonmore also indicated that rather than appointing them, they should be, as has been the custom, elected, I believe his words were. To me, Mr. Speaker, that demonstrates a true misunderstanding of the system from the public education point of view. In fact, public education boards have hired superintendents in the past. It's the board of trustees who are elected.

The opposition has leaped from issue to issue faster than most people change channels on their TV. Yet without the cuts to education, funding to other areas such as health, social services, and advanced education would be hit harder. While this government has tried to reduce the burden on the areas that Albertans told us were most important, the opposition wants to see them hit harder.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo. Oh, sorry; it ran out. I don't hear the bell, so . . .

All right. I'm supposed to say that I am going to interrupt the hon. Member for Little Bow under Standing Order 8(5)(b), which states that all questions must be decided to conclude debate on the private member's public Bill which has received 120 minutes of debate at second reading.

I must now put the following question to conclude debate. All those in favour of second reading of Bill 202, Alberta Task Force on Education Act, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Defeated. Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:34 p.m.]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Beniuk	Hewes	Sapers
Bruseker	Kirkland	Sekulic
Collingwood	Langevin	Soetaert
Dalla-Longa	Leibovici	Van Binsbergen
Decore	Massey	Vasseur
Dickson	Mitchell	White
Germain	Nicol	Zariwny
Hanson	Percy	Zwozdesky
Henry		

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For: - 25 Against - 44

[Motion lost]

Bill 203
Citizen's Initiative Act

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll give time for my colleagues to leave the House.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're all leaving.

MR. HAVELOCK: They are. They're leaving, yes.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is indeed with pleasure that I rise in the House to address my colleagues on . . . [interjections] I know they've all gone. I know.

It is indeed a pleasure to rise and address Bill 203, the Citizen's Initiative Act. This Act, which encompasses the direct democracy principles of initiative and referendum, is in recognition of and in response to a dynamic and rapidly changing political environment. Prior to addressing the specific provisions of the Act, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make some brief introductory remarks regarding the need for and the historical relevance of such legislation.

Mr. Speaker, recent interest in parliamentary reform may be attributed to a number of converging factors. Traditionally, the populist culture in Alberta has regarded organized power and, in particular, partisan government activities with suspicion. This sentiment has been fuelled by a general sense of western alienation and a distrust of the essential Canadian political elite.

In addition to this populist factor, Mr. Speaker, we must be cognizant of changes in Alberta's political economy and the expectations of voters. Prior to the 1980s abundant provincial revenues encouraged the centralization of decision-making in the executive branch and enabled the government to respond favourably to demands for increased public services. Decreasing revenues and annual deficits in the mid-80s have dramatically altered our balance sheet. Alberta is now a net debtor province, and there is a general sense that we must control public expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, the consequences of such populist and economic factors for elected officials are significant. The politics of taxation, reductions in public spending, and increased accountability are dominating the political agenda. The electorate is well informed and no longer content to occupy a passive role. Voters are asserting that direct participation in Alberta's evolving political process will lead to better decisions.

Mr. Speaker, direct democracy principles are not alien to western Canadian politics. By way of example, Manitoba passed the Initiative and Referendum Act in 1916, though its provisions were interpreted as being incompatible with the law-making powers conferred on Legislatures by the BNA Act. Similar legislation was enacted in each of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia prior to the 1920s. However, all Acts were either subsequently repealed or not proclaimed due to the constitutional uncertainties associated with the provisions. Nevertheless, notwithstanding such constitutional difficulties, the issue has again assumed prominence in political circles.

In response to public pressure, Mr. Speaker, British Columbia passed the Referendum Act in 1990. Such provisions were utilized during the 1991 general election to measure support for the recall of elected representatives and citizen initiative legislation. Of the valid votes cast, in excess of 80 percent supported both proposals. Further, despite the election results not being legally binding on the elected New Democratic government, the Premier verbally committed to recall and initiative legislation in the 1994 spring session.

Mr. Speaker, British Columbia is not alone in experimenting with direct democracy principles. In 1991 Saskatchewan passed legislation enabling the provincial cabinet to submit either referendum or plebiscite questions to the electorate. Matters addressed by referendum are binding if more than 60 percent of voters cast ballots in favour of the proposal, whereas plebiscites are advisory in nature.

4:50

Having discussed the rationale and historical implications of initiative legislation, Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the specific provisions of Bill 203. The Act is composed of three sections organized chronologically by the major steps involved in the initiative process. Any eligible voter in the province may propose that an initiative referendum be held to require the Legislative Assembly to introduce a Bill. The Clerk of the Assembly and Parliamentary Counsel ensure that the sponsor's proposal is valid. To be so determined, a proposal must not appropriate any part of the public revenue, impose any tax, be outside the powers of a provincial Legislature as enumerated in the Canadian Constitution, or contravene the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Once declared valid, Parliamentary Counsel prepares a question describing the proposal, which will appear on the sponsor's petition. A summary setting forth the purpose of the proposal accompanies the question. The sponsor then has 360 days to collect signatures on the petition in support of the proposal and submit them to the Chief Electoral Officer for verification. For a petition to succeed, the sponsor must satisfy two thresholds, these being signatures totaling 10 percent of the ballots cast in the last provincial election, plus signatures totaling 10 percent of such ballots in at least two-thirds of all provincial electoral divisions. If the petition satisfies the foregoing requirements, the proposal will be placed on the ballot of an initiative referendum.

Initiative referendums, Mr. Speaker, as set forth in the Act are held in conjunction with the next provincial general election. To successfully pass this stage, a proposal requires a simple majority of votes cast in the province as well as a simple majority in two-thirds of all provincial electoral divisions. Assuming the double majority is achieved, the Legislative Assembly must introduce the proposal in Bill form at the next sitting of the Legislature.

It is important to note that the Assembly is not required to pass the Bill but rather to treat it the same as any other Bill introduced in the House. While the political consequences of ignoring the electorate may be severe, the nonbinding nature of the initiative eliminates objections to the proposal being unconstitutional.

Additional safeguards are included in the Bill, Mr. Speaker. To reduce special interest group influence, initiative petitions must be accompanied by full disclosure of the expenditures related thereto, including the donor source for all money or real or personal property provided for solicitation purposes.

Mr. Speaker, parliamentary reform is a difficult issue. The very essence of responsible government is threatened by and inconsistent with the principles of direct democracy. I also recognize the negative political ramifications of direct democracy for governments implementing unpopular though necessary policies. Nevertheless, we are elected to represent the views of our constituents and, to the extent possible, to advocate for change on their behalf. It is not, nor should it be, our objective to maintain the status quo and prevent our existing political system from evolving to better reflect voter opinions.

To close, Mr. Speaker, we as a government have embarked on a course of significant economic reform. Political reform in my view is essential to ensure the success of our economic initiatives. While I recognize that there are deficiencies inherent in Bill 203, such as the purely advisory nature of the citizen initiative, I believe it is an important first step. Consequently, I urge all members of this House to support the principles inherent in Bill 203.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We hope we see as much enthusiasm when this matter comes to a vote.

I stand in support of Bill 203. Bill 203 is a form of what's typically called direct democracy, and it's usually treated as a companion of another instrument of direct democracy, recall. I must advise you, Mr. Speaker, that although I support Bill 203, I'm still convinced, as most of the commentators are, that if you want direct democracy, the tool that really works, the tool that really makes electors accountable is the right of recall. Unfortunately, as a consequence of a vote in the last session that particular initiative didn't proceed, sir.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

What I want to address is I think a regret I have that our parliamentary system is seen as lacking. There's a reason why these kinds of direct democracy, these kinds of direct initiatives are attractive, particularly to electors in Alberta. The reason is that our parliamentary system, this Legislature, is seen as being ineffective. It's seen as being remote. It's seen as not adequately responding to real people's real concerns. I think for the system to work, to be able to slake or to address the demand that we see for these kinds of direct initiatives, whether initiative or recall, it means that there would have to be a sea change in terms of the way this government conducts its business. The secrecy of this government, the unwillingness to share information with Albertans through the agency of the Official Opposition, the fact that we don't have freedom of information reinforces that sense of alienation, that sense of distrust. The standing committee system that we see in this House is an insult to the 549,044 Albertans who voted on June 15 for someone other than a Conservative candidate. The unwillingness of this government to listen, to care: to Albertans who are angry with the government's power grab and money grab in terms of education, all of those things fuel dissatisfaction with government. Although I support Bill 203, I think it's a poor second, and the first and most appropriate response is for government to listen, for government to ensure that this Legislature is open and representative in a way that it's not now.

The ultimate irony I think, Mr. Speaker, is that we're undoubtedly going to hear from government members who ridicule this Bill as they ridiculed the recall initiative. The irony is that there will be those in this Chamber who attack this kind of a populist measure, but the populist measure is really only attractive because the government has by its own deeds and actions, more importantly by its inaction, subverted the parliamentary system, which is supposed to be practical and flexible.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear about what Bill 203 does and what it does not do. Firstly, I think it has to be very clear that what we're talking about here is an opportunity for voters to require an issue to be voted on in this Legislature. We already have a provision in the Election Act in this province which allows the Lieutenant Governor to hold a plebiscite on any issue at any time, either in conjunction with an election or independent of elections. What this particular Bill will do means that it's not the cabinet that decides what items will be the subject of a plebiscite, but it will in fact be a large group of voters who make that determination.

I think it's misleading in this Bill to talk about a referendum. In my understanding, Mr. Speaker, a referendum is something that has some binding effect. A plebiscite is simply a solicitation of opinion. We saw referenda in Alberta when Edmonton and Calgary sought to expend large amounts of money on new public buildings. That was a binding referendum or referenda. What

we're dealing with here is really a form of plebiscite, and I think it's important that we don't oversell this initiative and treat it as something more than that.

I think when we look at what we're about here, it is clear that as a consequence of past court decisions we can't have what some describe as a self-executing type of initiative. Legally, constitutionally the most that we can do is simply to be able to allow voters the facility, the opportunity to force this Legislature to deal with a question, to deal with it in Bill form and then vote on its merits.

5:00

There has been experience in other provinces dealing with this, and those have been pointed out by the mover of this particular Bill. I think it's important to note that there has been a substantial history in Alberta and in Canada of this kind of recourse to opinion, to voters, and to electors. The simple process of elections every four or five years obviously doesn't meet the need. We've seen in Canada the constitutional referendum in the fall of 1992, in Quebec the plebiscite on sovereignty association in 1980, the plebiscite more recently in Prince Edward Island on the fixed link, the plebiscite dealing with a potential split of the Northwest Territories. One has to ask: if we didn't have that facility, how else would we have been able to consult those Canadians, to be able to do so in an issue-focused way, independent of an election, independent of partisan politics? They were useful tools in those cases.

It was a useful tool when the United Kingdom, the font of parliamentary democracy, had a plebiscite in 1975 on whether the United Kingdom was going to participate in the European Common Market. That was found to be a useful tool, a useful way of canvassing opinion. Similarly, it was the United Kingdom that had sponsored the plebiscite in 1973 in Northern Ireland as to whether the residents wanted that province to remain part of the U.K.

So it's foolishness for anybody to suggest that this kind of a consultation with voters has no place in a parliamentary democracy or is somehow foreign to our system of government. It's not. We have a substantial history with those kinds of initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the specific Bill that's in front of us, it does have some useful provisions, but there are a number of shortcomings, and what I intend to do is highlight a number of them. I think it's useful to contrast Bill 203 with the recommendations from British Columbia, where they've had a select special committee which spent a good deal of time reviewing this whole idea of initiative and made a number of specific recommendations.

I think, for example, in the Bill that's been put in front of us, there are disclosure requirements with respect to how a referendum campaign can be financed, but there's no limit on what can be spent. That was a useful recommendation made in the B.C. report of November 1993, recommendation 40.

The hon. member who puts this Bill in front of us proposes that electors would have 360 days to amass the requisite number of signatures. In British Columbia the recommendation was 60 to 90 days. I think 60 to 90 days may be too short, but I clearly think 360 days is excessive, and what is more excessive is that there's a provision for an additional 30 days if the petition first fails for want of signatures. So I have a difficulty with that. I mean, I think it could be condensed considerably.

I think the proposal is flawed in terms of having the Speaker introduce a Bill in the Legislature. I have a great deal of difficulty with that. I don't think there's any precedent for having a Speaker introduce a Bill. I think much better to have whether it's the chairman of the Private Bills Committee or some other

member charged with a responsibility introduce a Bill, but I don't think it's appropriate to have the Speaker introduce the Bill.

I think there's a provision here – and I compliment the mover – requiring that the initiative has to conform with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I'm not sure that goes far enough. I'm not sure whether you don't also want to make it subject to the Individual's Rights Protection Act in this province, because I think we're anxious to ensure that minority rights aren't trampled by a majority in this kind of a context, a referendum. So I think it's useful to have that limitation, but I think we might add onto it.

The other thing that is of interest to me: in British Columbia what they said is that there shouldn't be limits on what type of material could be sought in one of these referenda. In the Bill that's in front of us, you can't be involved in terms of using public moneys, you can't be involved in raising taxes, and I think that's problematic. I think what the British Columbia select special committee recommended – and it makes sense to me – is: leave it wide open. As long as it doesn't offend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, why not simply give those electors – and there has to be a very large number – the freedom to determine what should be the subject of the referenda? I think that would be a positive change.

I think, Mr. Speaker, there's a problem with allowing up to five referenda in conjunction with a provincial general election. I think that's too many, and to any of us that have watched the problems that municipal voters have when they're electing school trustees and they're electing aldermen to city councils and there may be a plebiscite on fluoridation and there may be a plebiscite on something else – I think five is too many. I think there should be a limit of perhaps one or two.

I think it's problematic to insist that the referenda can only take place in conjunction with a provincial general election. Why limit it in that fashion? I think British Columbia has made a very positive move when they suggested as a consequence of their committee deliberations that it shouldn't be so narrowly defined, that it could be a stand-alone provision.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are too many issues that have been left in the Bill in front of us that have been delegated to the Lieutenant Governor in Council by section 28. I think British Columbia recommendation 23 was more positive, which said: don't simply allow this stuff to be filled in later by way of regulation; as much of it as possible ought to be incorporated in the statute. I think that's always a sound policy. It would be a sound policy here, and it would make this stronger as a consequence.

Standing back from the specific changes I've suggested – and I'll be happy if this matter gets to committee to propose specific amendments – I think there are some other general concerns that have to be addressed. The concerns, in fact, are so important, Mr. Speaker, that I've written the notes at least twice and set it down in some key and accessible place on my desk.

Mr. Speaker, in any event, I think I'll simply conclude by saying that I think all members should support this Bill, not because it's perfect, not because it's going to in a single stroke address or solve the problem of voter disaffection, but I think on the other hand to defeat this Bill sends out absolutely the wrong message. We have to show Albertans that we are interested in reflecting their wishes. I think we have to show Albertans that ultimately they're in the driver's seat. We're simply here as servants. We're here as conduits of their opinions, their views, and their values. I think that by supporting this particular kind of referendum and this kind of a process, it underscores the fact that we're here to serve those people and it's not the reverse.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak to Bill 203, the Citizen's Initiative Act, sponsored by my colleague from Calgary-Shaw. I support this Bill for a number of reasons. One, we need to involve the citizenry to a greater extent than our current system allows; two, we need to provide Albertans with a mechanism to bypass their MLA when he or she fails to represent the wishes of the majority of their constituents; and three, as it is designed, Bill 203 will enhance our system for a democratic government in Alberta.

The basis for modern democracy is the belief that every adult person's judgment about the conduct of public affairs is entitled to be given equal weight with each other person. However different these individuals may be financially, intellectually, or religiously, these individuals have a right to say how they wish to be governed.

5:10

From the original form of direct democracy practised by the Greeks many years ago, our democracy restricts the ability of average Albertans to voice their opinions. Our representative democracy requires that Albertans vote for their representative once every five years. Between elections, however, it is the representative who makes the decisions, with as little or as much input from their constituents as time and the pressure of party discipline allow.

History tells us that Albertans and western Canadians favour a more direct system of government. In the early part of this century Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba passed legislation allowing for citizen initiative and other forms of direct democracy. The desire of many western Canadians to have a more direct system of government still prevails. Saskatchewan passed new legislation in 1991 allowing for referenda. British Columbia held a referendum during the last provincial election on the issue of recall and initiative, with an all-party committee just completing its report in November. Increased access to the law-making process is very much an issue, one which all MLAs would be wise to pay attention to.

In June of 1992 the Legislature passed Bill 1, the Constitutional Referendum Act. This Act recognized the need to consult Albertans on the issue of constitutional change. I would suggest that the reasons which led to the introduction of Bill 1 by the government of the day still exist today and the need to address them is no less urgent. One of the reasons why jurisdictions in Canada and the western United States have instituted one form or another of direct democracy is the growing sense of inadequacy of the representative form of democracy in dealing with people's concerns. In the U.S. populist demands of the 1920s and '30s led to the introduction of plebiscites and initiatives in many U.S. states. As I mentioned earlier, the four western provinces responded to the populist message by introducing their own forms of direct democracy. In western Canada the issue was domination by central Canadian business and political elites and the dominating influence such interests wielded in western Canada.

The issue today is not one of regional disparity but one of access and more representation. Albertans are more aware than ever of the influence that special interest groups wield on political process. Position and wealth should have little bearing on how decisions are made, and even the perception exists that such influences are active in our system of government. Albertans will and are demanding that they be given a mechanism to override the system and bring the issue to the table.

One of the main arguments leveled against mechanisms of direct democracy, such as the citizen initiative, is one of ignorance of

the electorate. There may once have been a time when those holding elected office represented levels of wealth and education not found in the average man in society and were in a better position to make an informed decision. Today such argument is invalid and inaccurate. There is no longer a difference in wealth or in education between voters and their representatives, as there was in the 19th century when modern democracy was transplanted to this continent. Alberta offers the most educated population in Canada, and we are very much considered a have province in relation to others. In some cases, if not most, I could find someone in my constituency that has a better understanding of the issues at hand than I do. For any member of this House to think differently is nothing short of contempt and arrogance towards those who elected you. To perpetuate the myth of informed and enlightened MLAs versus the ignorant and uneducated constituents would be wrong. Albertans are in as good a position to pass judgment on proposed legislation as we are. To limit their participation to once every five years would be a great tragedy.

At the same time, however, a move to a more direct form of democracy has to be made with care. Individual Albertans need to become more aware of the issues which face our society. They must made aware of the consequences of their judgment and share in the responsibility of their decisions. Precedent has been set. Albertans responded in a very positive way to being involved in amending the Canadian Constitution through a referendum held in the fall of 1992. Albertans have been able to influence their local governments through plebiscites for many years. Albertans deserve and demand the right to have direct access to legislative process. The time for the citizen initiative has come to the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak in favour of this Bill, and I would like to commend the Member for Calgary-Shaw for giving birth, if I may call it that, to this Bill. I find him to be uncharacteristically perceptive in that he has perceived that there is alienation amongst Albertans. They feel alienated. They feel estranged from their government. On a recent trip up north I was privy to that, and I think I mentioned already that in the riding of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and in the riding of Dunvegan several residents of the area felt very much cut off from what was going on. I think that had this mechanism been in existence, they might well have reached for it and halted the government in its efforts to make all these significant changes without a mandate.

I also find it significant that the Member for Calgary-Shaw speaks about increased accountability. I think the point has been made before that, amazingly enough, his government is consistently opposing the disclosure of all kinds of information that we are entitled to as taxpayers and also of course that the freedom of information Act, or whatever it is going to be called, has not yet the seen light of day. Again, it's all part and parcel of this accountability. I'm all for it, particularly because – and again I think that point has been made; at least it perhaps ought to be underscored again – this government tends not to listen to the opposition. So perhaps once this mechanism is in place, they will be compelled to listen to the people.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll just leave it at that because one of my colleagues is chafing here and would like to speak against it.

Thank you very much.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak in favour of this Bill today. The purpose of Bill 203 is to allow Albertans to propose and vote on legislation. If the legislation is approved by Albertans through the referendum process, the legislation will then be tabled in this House and be treated as any private member's Bill would be treated: hopefully, free votes on both sides.

The double majority provision in gathering signatures and during the general vote will ensure that one region of the province does not dominate the others based purely on population. Proposed legislation will require the overall support of Albertans throughout the province.

Provisions of Bill 203 do not in any way threaten our current system of government. The outcome of the referendum is not binding on the government, and I think that's an important point to be made. Bills passed through this process will be exposed to the same scrutiny through debate and amendments that other nongovernment Bills are subject to.

There is some history in our parliamentary tradition of initiatives such as this. They've already been mentioned, so I won't go into detail on them. Saskatchewan in 1991 passed legislation such as this. British Columbia held a referendum during its last provincial election on citizen initiatives. British Columbians overwhelmingly supported it. In 1992 the Alberta Legislature passed Bill 1, the Constitutional Referendum Act. Albertans were given the opportunity to have direct input in what the position of the Alberta government was going to be. If Albertans were smart enough to vote on the Constitution, then why not give them the opportunity to propose legislation to this House?

AN HON. MEMBER: That was a mistake.

5:20

DR. L. TAYLOR: No, hon. member, it was not a mistake.

As it stands, Bill 203 requires that approximately 100,000 Albertans sign a petition before any initiative can be approved and voted on during a general vote. Part of that 100,000 has to form at least two-thirds of Alberta's electoral divisions. This provides an adequate check against large population centres abusing this mechanism. In other words, Edmonton and Calgary cannot control this agenda.

For an initiative to be approved during the referendum process, it would require double majority support from Albertans. One, it would require a simple majority of all votes cast; and two, it would require a simple majority in at least two-thirds of Alberta's electoral divisions.

Again, the support of a majority of Albertans from across the province would be required for a proposal to pass this stage and be tabled in the Legislative Assembly. Issues which may be divisive and which may not be brought into the public forum for debate and resolution can be brought forward through the initiative process by concerned citizens. Many times these initiatives don't get to this House for a number of reasons, but this will allow citizens to bring these issues forward.

The citizen initiative will increase the awareness of Albertans in the political process by allowing them to have a direct say in what issues the Legislature will deal with, and I think that's important. If we look at the number of people that are voting in provincial elections, sometimes it's as low as 50 percent. This will allow more citizens to be involved and encourage more active involvement of the citizenry.

In conclusion, I would like to say that if Albertans are knowledgeable enough to vote for their elected representative, then they are knowledgeable enough to take some responsibility in determining what issues the Legislature should be dealing with.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the time I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn this session.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Debate, debate.

DR. L. TAYLOR: No. I'm adjourning the session. I've had enough.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has moved that we now adjourn debate and call it 5:30. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:25 p.m.]