

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 1, 1994**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 94/03/01

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank You for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves.

We ask You to ensure to us Your guidance and the will to follow it.

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek your leave to present a petition with 41 signatures of Calgarians concerned about the proposed restructuring of the educational system in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a petition comprised of 881 signatures from all over Alberta: from Jasper, Rocky Mountain House, Barrhead, Slave Lake, Lacombe, Wetaskiwin. They would like us to implement a policy not to allow literature in the educational system that is intolerant of any religion, including Christianity, and in particular, not to allow any books in the school curriculum that demean or profane the name of God or Jesus Christ.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition signed by 548 citizens of Alberta, primarily from southwest Calgary and southeast Calgary. The petition petitions the Legislative Assembly to urge the government not to go ahead with its proposed restructuring of the education system, specifically, sir, with regard to the provincial employment of superintendents and the taxation base being left with the local municipality.

Thank you very much.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition signed by 5,589 people from Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Duffield, Wabamun, Calahoo, Onoway, Villeneuve, Jasper, and St. Albert, in general a large area northwest of Edmonton. This petition urges

the government to maintain the Misericordia as a Full-Service, Active Hospital and continue to serve the West-end of Edmonton and surrounding area.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on February 23 regarding ECS funding in this province be now read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to:

Maintain the current Early Childhood Services program and continue providing the necessary assistance to children with special needs.

Further, the undersigned also request the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to recognize the vital importance of these programs by amending the School Act to guarantee Early Childhood Services for all children and early intervention and inclusion (integration) with the appropriate support services for all children with special needs.

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled in the House on Tuesday, February 22 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 Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking that the petition I had introduced on February 23 from residents of Calgary-Cross and Calgary-McCall now be read and received. Thank you.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta not to implement the plan to restructure the educational system in Alberta, as proposed by the Minister of Education.

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

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will be moving that written questions do stand and retain their places on the Order Paper with the exception of the following written questions: 144, 145, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 166, and 167.

Also I wish to give notice that I will be moving that motions for returns stand and retain their places on the Order Paper except for motions for returns 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, and 164.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 14(2) of the Motion Picture Development Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly today the 1992-93 annual report of the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table with the Legislative Assembly the Alberta Tourism Education Council annual report for 1993.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I am filing with the Assembly today the quarterly report of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund as well as the agreement between the government of Alberta and Murphy Oil Company Ltd. regarding the purchase of a 5 percent interest in the Syncrude project.

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

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table four copies of Motion for a Return 205 and Motion for a Return 214, both of these from last fall's session. The hon. member opposite who asked the questions had been given written notification back in December of the past year.

I'm also pleased to table four copies of the 10th annual report of the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves and four copies of the surface reclamation fund annual report. Both of these reports are to the period ending March 31, 1993.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table 28 letters from Calgarians urging the government to reinstate funding for the community school program.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. ZWOZDESKEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you 69 living and vibrant examples of Alberta's most precious resource: our young people. These 69 visitors are from the grade 6 French immersion school J.H. Picard, which is one of the many lovely schools in Edmonton-Avonmore. They are accompanied today by M. Louis Jacques, Mme Yvonne Chevalier, et M. Daniel Blais. Avec grand plaisir, je vous dis bienvenue. I would ask that they now rise and take the normal welcome of this House.

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to stand in my place and introduce to you the Yellowhead home educators. They've traveled here from Edson, Niton Junction, Fulham, and the Peers area. There are seven adults and 12 students in the group. I've asked them to pay special attention to question period so they can give me a report on what they hear. They're accompanied by their parents and leaders Mr. George Stone, Mrs. Carolyn Stone, Mr. Verdon Kerr, Mrs. Janice Kerr, Mrs. Maggie Moffat, Mr. Ben Alhf, and Mrs. Lori Dennett. They're in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise, and let's give them a warm welcome.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 26 visitors, grade 5 and 6 students from the fine school of Richard Secord in the heart of Edmonton-Rutherford. They are accompanied today by their teacher Miss Patricia March. They're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a member from the Innisfail constituency: Mr. Lionel Walker. He's here to watch the proceedings of the Legislature. He's in the members' gallery, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS CALAHASEN: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Irene Salisbury from High Prairie in the wonderful constituency of Lesser Slave Lake. Irene has served as deputy mayor in the town of High Prairie and has initiated many community projects in High Prairie and region. She is also a co-owner of Do-All Contracting. She is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd appreciate it if she could stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**
Senior Citizens' Programs

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the men and women who built this province know how to plan for their future, but most seniors in this province live on fixed incomes. Mr. Minister, stability is something that they value dearly, stability today, next year, the year after that, and all through their years. But that stability has been blown apart by your government conducting a new social experiment. My first question to you is this. Someone earning \$18,200 a year who can't afford to pay \$384 for health care premiums at the same time loses the \$600 a year in rental subsidies. How can they do it?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear in discussing this matter with seniors throughout the province that there is a very clear willingness for seniors to participate in our program of deficit elimination. As I've said in this House before – and I will say it again – the consultation process does not begin and end with a single roundtable. It does not begin and end with a single minister's visit. It does not begin and end with consultations but must continue throughout the province of Alberta. Very clearly, senior citizens of this province who have helped build this province are a very important part of our government's programs. By definition seniors in this province are people who were born before 1930. Very clearly they understand the reason why government must get its books in order, and they are prepared to do their fair and reasonable part.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, does the minister have any idea of the pain and the fear that the minister and this government are causing the seniors in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, people in this government and seniors throughout the province are concerned, but they are not fear mongers. They are concerned about how this program will affect them, and this government is concerned particularly about people who are low-income seniors. That's the reason why the Alberta seniors' benefit will provide a better benefit for 35 percent of seniors in this province than they presently receive.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Minister, what gives you the right to experiment with the lives of our mothers and fathers in this province?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the principles outlined by seniors throughout this province are protect low-income people, amalgamate, and streamline your programs. We want to make sure that there is a fair way of determining that those that can afford to pay will pay. Accordingly, we have put together a program that responds to all of those principles. We do protect low-income seniors. We do have a fair and reasonable income test that does not take into account the value of assets. We do amalgamate our programs. We have put five programs from three departments and amalgamated them and streamlined them into one program delivered by one department and administered through one window. That is what seniors in this province want.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, seniors earning less than \$17,000 a year will not now pay health care premiums, but those who earn \$18,200 will be fully taxed. In between, the tax is graduated. Our caucus has calculated that on that difference, the difference between those two sums, \$1,200, the tax rate will be 61 percent. Mr. Minister, why would you claw back 61 cents on every dollar from seniors earning so little?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, to be clear again, approximately 53 percent of seniors in this province still will pay no Alberta health care insurance premium. There are approximately 7 percent of Alberta seniors in this province who will pay a partial health care premium, and the balance of approximately 40 percent will pay full Alberta health care insurance premiums. It's very clear that we have protected those people who are in greatest need. Those people who can afford to pay should pay, and that is a very, very clearly stated principle.

MR. DECORE: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought the question was pretty clear, but nicely dodged, Mr. Minister.

Second question, Mr. Minister. Millionaires in this province do not pay 61 percent rates on their taxes. They don't pay that kind of a rate. Why do you think it's fair that Alberta seniors pay that kind of a rate?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, to accept the premise of the Leader of the Opposition's question would be to suggest that this is a tax, and it is not. It is very clearly not a tax, as the Provincial Treasurer has clearly stated in this House.

MR. DECORE: You just dodged another one, Mr. Minister. You just dodged another one. Alberta seniors want some answers from the minister responsible.

My last question, Mr. Minister, is: why are you forcing the seniors of this province to pay for the sins of 20 years of mismanagement by the Conservative Party?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, in 1992-93 this province spent \$1.1 billion on programs to support seniors. Our three-year business plan will see that number go to \$916 million, or approximately a 15 percent change, over a three-year period. Seniors throughout this province have said: "We helped build this province. We're prepared to contribute our share to make sure this province stays great."

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I quote first from a Tory campaign brochure of June 1993: "245,000 seniors will continue to receive Basic Health services and Blue Cross." This budget now indicates that health care premiums and Blue Cross

will be charged to all seniors who do not qualify for the Alberta seniors' benefit. My question, then, is to the minister responsible for seniors. The Premier promised seniors. Mr. Minister, he promised them. How can you defend this broken promise?

1:50

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, unless the hon. member who asked the question has some additional information to add, that promise has been kept. Seniors will continue to receive health care services in this province, and accordingly there's no question there.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know when a promise has been broken.

Mr. Speaker, a question again to the minister. For the record and to be absolutely clear will all benefits available to seniors under the proposed Alberta seniors' benefit program be income tested at the very same level as Alberta health care premiums; that is, \$17,000 a year to begin?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the setting of the income thresholds for eligibility for the Alberta seniors' benefit program is a fair and reasonable estimate of those people who are able to pay a portion of their health care premiums. Very simply, those people who fall below the threshold will receive a net cheque on a monthly or quarterly basis. Above that level, seniors will start to pay for a portion of their health care premiums or may pay full health care premiums.

MRS. HEWES: If I understand correctly, that applies to every single seniors' program. Mr. Speaker, patently unfair.

My final question to the minister is: will all seniors who do not qualify for the Alberta seniors' benefit now have to pay Blue Cross premiums as well as health care premiums in total?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the question on Blue Cross premiums, I'm happy to have the Minister of Health respond to that matter, but with respect to health care premiums, those that are above the thresholds, yes, they will be paying.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to clarify for the hon. members in the House. The Alberta seniors' benefit program, as the minister responsible for seniors has stated, combines five programs. I should clarify for all members present the programs that are not affected by the Alberta seniors' benefit program. They are home care. They are Alberta Aids to Daily Living, long-term care, mental health services, allied health services, physiotherapy, chiropractic, optometry, podiatry, all physician services, all public health services, all acute care hospital services, and all Blue Cross benefits. Income testing will not be applied to any of these services.

Distance Learning Centre

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Speaker, this government just presented a budget that's going to bring about significant change, and I applaud that direction. In discussing this with my constituents, I was asked about the \$10 million renovations to the Alberta Distance Learning Centre in Barrhead as reported in the newspaper. When I checked my supplementary estimates, I can't find such an expenditure. I wonder if the Deputy Premier, who is also the MLA for Barrhead-Westlock, would please explain where this \$10 million expenditure is coming from.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, it was an article in the daily newspaper in the province of Alberta dated Saturday, February 26, 1994, and I quote from the newspaper article:

Closer to the capital, \$10 million more will be spent on the new \$120-million Alberta Distance Learning Centre in Barrhead, the home town of deputy premier Ken Kowalski.

Well, what are the facts? The centre was built in 1983. It's not new. Secondly, it was built at a cost of \$9.8 million, not \$120 million as is reported in this newspaper. Thirdly, the renovations for fiscal year 1994-95 will be \$10,000, not \$10 million as has been reported in the paper. Now, one can look at the 1994-95 government estimates, the supplementary estimates, the element details, page 65, line 4.6.5 for the truth.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, Mr. Speaker, my constituents don't get a copy of the supplementary estimates and rely solely on responsible newspaper reporting for their information. Has the Deputy Premier considered requesting a correction or retraction of this misleading article?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, yesterday my office conveyed to the *Edmonton Journal* a fax asking them the following: your attention to this matter is appreciated; I look forward to your response. End quote. In addition to that, we did talk to the author of the article. I'm not aware that there has been a correction made in today's *Edmonton Journal*, but perhaps one will come in the next day or two.*

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

Senior Citizens' Programs

(continued)

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday's budget left many seniors furious after seeing the threshold income levels for the new Alberta seniors' benefit. To the Minister of Community Development: why are you treating a senior couple with a combined income of \$27,600 as rich folks? Why?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, to correct the hon. member's observation, seniors throughout this province are concerned about how this program will affect them, but they are not angry. Most people are reasonable. People express themselves in a reasonable and rational way, and accordingly it makes a good environment for discussions that will take place, consultations that we will have in our explaining of the Alberta seniors' benefit so people will know how this program will impact them.

Mr. Speaker, I have never said that a senior couple at \$27,000, the figure referred to by the hon. member, is rich, but I am saying that it is fair and it is reasonable for people to pay for health care premiums.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Why did you design a program under which a senior couple earning just \$27,600 loses \$4,500 worth in Alberta seniors' benefits?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would like to have entertained that question, but I couldn't hear it.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. This is a clear example as to why people should be quiet when questions are being asked. In this particular case, the noise was coming from the opposition caucus who made it difficult for its own member to be heard.

Senior Citizens' Programs

(continued)

MR. YANKOWSKY: Mr. Minister, why did you design a program under which a senior couple earning just \$27,600 loses \$4,500 in Alberta seniors' benefits?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, seniors have said throughout this province that they are prepared to do their part to ensure that those people who are in greatest need of assistance receive that need. People have clearly said that age should not be established as the only criterion for your eligibility for assistance from government but need must be the criterion. Accordingly, we respond to that, and those who are in greatest need are those who will be protected and will benefit.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Mr. Minister, why are you eliminating the seniors' middle class?

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair has been very lenient in allowing questions that are really asking for opinions rather than asking for facts. This is clearly a question that's asking for an opinion.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

2:00

Teachers' Conventions

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. In the last couple of weeks we've had teachers' conventions in both Calgary and Edmonton. My understanding is that there are over 15,000 teachers in the two largest cities in our province within those individual conventions. When added up between the two cities, out of the 15,000-plus teachers 3,000 teachers evidently attended these particular conventions. My question to the minister: are these days compulsory for teachers in this province? Are they part of a contractual obligation, and if they're not compulsory, can we make them?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the provision for teachers' conventions is a long-standing provision of the School Act. Two days is stipulated. Teachers are paid for that time, and attendance is mandatory.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you. Mr. Minister, how many days off do teachers in this province get for professional development days, and are the two days that have been set aside for teachers' convention part of the number of days they get for professional development?

MR. JONSON: First of all, I do have to take some issue with the introductory phrase, and that is that days off for professional development or days off for teachers' conventions are not off as such, Mr. Speaker. They are there for teachers to get upgrading, to hone their skills, to learn additional information pertaining to their profession. So I think we have to keep that in mind.

Also, the Alberta Teachers' Association convention associations do a great deal of work to organize conventions, as do teachers at the local level who usually handle the planning of their own

*see p. 311, left col., para. 3

professional development days. Typically across this province I would estimate, Mr. Speaker, that three to four days per school year are devoted on average to professional development in addition to the two days set aside in the School Act for conventions.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how much does each one of the professional development days or the convention days cost Albertan taxpayers if every teacher in the province gets them? And I assume they do.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think there may be two parts to the answer I will give the hon. member. First of all, in terms of the actual conducting of the conventions or the professional development days, this is financed through fees or through other provisions and, except for perhaps the utilities to heat the school where it may be held, is not charged directly to school budgets.

In terms of what the salary amount would represent for these days, I would estimate across the province, Mr. Speaker, that it would probably be about 10 millions of dollars per day that goes into teachers' salaries.

Senior Citizens' Programs (continued)

MR. WICKMAN: The Premier's election brochure states: "109,380 Seniors will benefit from the Property Tax Reduction program." Mr. Speaker, it's all changed; it's different. To the minister responsible for seniors: how does the minister explain this broken promise?

MR. MAR: We've got a better program than we had before. Mr. Speaker, the principles that people have stated and the response that government has have been very, very encouraging. The principles protect lower income seniors. We've done that. Thirty-five percent of seniors will have a better benefit than they have now. With respect to amalgamation and streamlining, we've done that. Five programs from three departments are now amalgamated into one. With respect to making sure that it's fair and reasonable: do not invoke a means test. We did not. We have a fair and reasonable income test.

DR. WEST: I'd like to supplement with a little information relevant to the question. In 1993 114,000 seniors collected the tax benefit on home ownership and 58,000 picked up the home owners' rental assistance of \$1,200. An interesting fact is: if you put those couples that live together, over 70 percent of Alberta seniors own their own home.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, to the minister that just responded to the last question, the minister responsible for Municipal Affairs: does he not realize that this reduction, this downsizing will result in driving thousands of seniors out of their homes?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, traditionally in the province of Alberta on par we have treated our seniors and those owning homes as well as those renting and those 23,000 living in provisions made by this province better than any other province. My mother lives in Georgetown, Ontario. I visited her a month and a half ago and compared the programs pound for pound. She is probably disadvantaged by 20 percent of her income difference than the province of Alberta.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, broken promises, broken promises, broken promises. How does the minister responsible for seniors intend to fix this broken promise?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, that question suggests that there has been a broken promise. There has not. The Premier of this province committed to seniors to consult with seniors before any changes were made to programs. That promise is being kept. While Liberals sleep, we're working on doing exactly that.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Did you get another cheque?

DR. OBERG: No. There's no other cheque today.

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

Utility Rates

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Recently Alberta Power Limited announced a price increase of 10 percent on power bills. This apparently was approved by the Public Utilities Board. Could you please tell me the amount of net profit the utilities are allowed in the agreement with the PUB?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year the Public Utilities Board, which is a separate body soon to be merged with the Energy Resources Conservation Board, reviews the costs of the utility companies that operate within the province of Alberta. In this particular case, in the 1992-93 year the costs that were fed through the EEMA process reflected an increase in costs for Alberta Power for their share of the Sheerness plant. As a result of that, the customers of Alberta Power were given a credit on their utility bill to reflect that additional cost for the flow of the cost of the development of the facility into the EEMA process. This is rather a long explanation. In any event, as a result, due to the annual review that the Public Utilities Board has gone through with regard to these costs, that credit has now run out, and now Alberta Power customers are faced with the normal cost of their facilities and not the accelerated cost that was originally there. So it has led to an increase to Alberta Power customers effective March 1 of this year.

Now, as far as the rate of return that has been given by the Public Utilities Board or granted through the hearing process, this year the current rate of return is 11.875 percent, Mr. Speaker, which is 1 percent lower.

MR. SPEAKER: Is there a supplemental question?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can I justify this percentage rate of return to my constituents in Bow Valley when savings accounts yield approximately 3 percent and cost of living increases are around 1 percent?

2:10

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, each year a review is done by the Public Utilities Board, not the government, and that is why they are kept separate from the government: so

that they do these reviews on utilities independently of all of the monopoly companies and utility companies within this province. While one year a group of clientele may receive a benefit, in subsequent years they will be brought back into line with the other utility ratepayers within the province of Alberta. It just so happens that this is the year that the Alberta Power customers are being brought into line with the others.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What can we as a government do to protect Albertans from these dramatic, unilateral price increases?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, some suggestions have come forward. One of them actually from one of the power companies is to have a more leveling effect on any of the changes as the costs are pooled in through the pooling process so that there aren't the spikes that occur. That is a proposal that they are putting forward to the PUB. However, I must remind hon. members that the Public Utilities Board is a quasi-judicial board that operates separately from this government, and as such we do not interfere with the rulings that come through the Public Utilities Board.

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

Senior Citizens' Programs (continued)

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week's budget reflected senior pain but no real gain for them. As a result, across the province seniors have objected. So today the minister says that he will discuss, he will consult, he will review. My short question to the minister today is: will he be raising the initial threshold upon which seniors will not have to pay health care benefits?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, from the very outset we have said that within the \$916 million that we spend on seniors' programs, there is flexibility. Frankly, the consultation process is a great deal of work, and I wouldn't go through that great deal of work if there weren't some flexibility. Seniors may say: "Raise the thresholds. We don't think another program is as important," and accordingly we may raise those thresholds. On the other hand, seniors may say that there's another program that is more important, that we should lower the thresholds. I will not stand here and say that I will know today exactly what seniors will say in the future. They may say: raise it. They may say: lower it. They may say: move money from other programs. At the end of the day the programs that we have for seniors will be almost one billion dollars in 1996-97.

MR. GERMAIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the budget the minister said that he was going to impose a threshold. Seniors have told him that it's too low. Will he raise it, or won't he?

Speaker's Ruling Repetition

MR. SPEAKER: Order. That is clearly a repetition of the first question and an indication that members believe they can force an answer that they wish to receive.

A final supplemental.

Senior Citizens' Programs (continued)

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you. Since you are considering raising the threshold, Mr. Minister, at what level will you place it?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it is not my position to predict what seniors will say.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Kindergarten Programs

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Education. With all the exciting changes that are being announced for education in Alberta, there are unfortunately a few rumours and even a few misunderstandings surrounding some of the details. Would the minister confirm that only trained and certified ECS staff will be allowed to instruct students who are funded by the early childhood services grants?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that the current regulations pertaining to certified teachers being involved in ECS will continue.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister to clarify that the ECS grants which were announced earlier this year will remain at the 50 percent level of support for the next two years in accordance with the business plan.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, that is certainly the plan. I can confirm that.

MR. TANNAS: Okay. Will the minister, then, agree that in those areas of Alberta where school boards do not choose to offer ECS classes, these grants will be available to parent-run and/or privately run ECS classes?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the provision for ECS services run by other than school boards, as the hon. member mentions, usually by parent councils or private operators, will continue as well.

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

Widows' Pension

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Blatant contradictions and inconsistency run throughout this provincial budget, and the obvious one is the disappearance of the widows' pension. As one senior in my constituency said: is the government really so devious, or are they just plain incompetent? My question is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Why is it that in your business plan you claim that the widows' pension will be replaced by the Alberta seniors' benefit plan, but over in Community Development the widows' pension is not even mentioned? What has happened to this program?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the particular program that's been addressed here of course is still in my budget. I've indicated to the Assembly before that in the three-year business plan my department will be spending over \$4 billion on services for people that are in need. There is no indication anywhere that the widows' pension has been eliminated.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, I want to hear this again. You're telling us that the widows' pension is still in place. Poor people between the ages of 55 and 65 under this program will still be taken care of under your department?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, that is the same question I answered before.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

MRS. SOETAERT: No.

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

Crow Benefit

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. In light of the Tyrchniewicz study, that was just completed and made public, could the minister inform this Assembly if there is a strong possibility that the Crow benefit now paid to the railroads could be paid directly to the farmers?

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have an issue here that indeed governments and the agricultural community have been dealing with for 20 to 25 years. To date we haven't been able to come forward with a resolution. The previous federal agriculture minister had struck a task force to do a detailed study and to bring recommendations forward to the federal agriculture minister as to how to deal with this very complex issue. In discussions with the federal minister as recently as last Sunday, he has indicated that indeed the Tyrchniewicz study will be tabled, and recommendations from that study will then be circulated throughout the agricultural community for input.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister maybe answer the question regarding the 15 percent cut in Crow benefit that was recently brought down in the federal budget? Could that be reinstated?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It is my understanding from discussions with the federal minister that indeed the 15 percent will not be reinstated. That together with the other 10 percent loss that was incurred two years ago means that we no longer receive 25 percent of the Crow benefit that the agricultural community was originally entitled to. This is important to the agricultural community and really stresses the importance of changing the method of payment, of paying the farmer, paying the producer, which indeed the Alberta government has been advocating for many, many years as the proper and fair process. Unfortunately, that has not happened. It is our intention to continue lobbying the federal government to institute these actions as early as possible, because the farmer is the one that ultimately should be able to manage his own decisions. This will allow the farmer to make proper management decisions.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?
The hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:20

Senior Citizens' Facilities

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With lodge privatization and user-fee increases seniors are stressed out about where they will be sleeping in the future. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how can you assure seniors that the privatization of seniors' housing will not be a repeat of your booze fiasco?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, some time ago there was a CBC special on which in a follow-up through the media left the connotation that we were looking at the privatization of existing senior facilities. Let me assure you that the comments made that evening were directed towards new facilities in the future in which the private sector could fill a gap for the rising number of requests for senior accommodations in different forms. I did not – and I repeat: I did not – say that we were privatizing the existing senior facilities. In that light, the allegations or innuendos left by this individual are wrong.

MR. BRACKO: You said it in Grande Prairie, and you know it. To the Minister of Community Development: how can a senior on a fixed income be expected to afford a \$350 a month increase in lodge rents?

MR. MAR: Bad acting, poor direction, bad script: it sounds like a Madonna movie, but it's the Liberal caucus, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government is concerned about those people that are particularly in need of assistance from government, and that's why under the Alberta seniors' benefit, 80,000 seniors will enjoy a better benefit than they presently receive.

DR. WEST: The individual asking the question again left on the floor of this Assembly the innuendo that I said something in Grande Prairie about the privatization of the existing senior facilities. I did not, Mr. Speaker. I did not leave the connotation, and I did not make remarks to that. That was not true.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. BRACKO: He knows it. You did it.

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

Labour Relations

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Labour. I realize that there have been positive developments in many areas of labour/management issues in Alberta. However, I am concerned that the minister may not be getting involved enough in the present dispute between Alberta Hospital Edmonton and the Health Care Employees Union. Is the minister planning to get more involved in this issue?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's concern about involvement in that particular dispute, and I think I can say that the government members on this side of the House certainly share that concern. However, it's important to recognize that in any labour/management dispute there is no way that the minister can step in and impose some kind of settlement. Both parties have to continue to work together, and one of the most basic principles of mediation is that the two sides work together to come to an agreement. In this particular case, as I understand it, the union has filed an unfair practices before the LRB. No date has yet been set on that. In this particular case, neither side

has requested a mediator according to the Public Service Employee Relations Act, so there is no way the minister will be stepping in on this.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a similar note, will the minister be looking at the present dispute between Indalex and the United Steelworkers?

MR. DAY: Well, that's an interesting example, Mr. Speaker, because those successful resolutions aren't as widely reported in the media as are disagreements. On February 18, in this particular situation, the company filed a lockout notice on the United Steelworkers. Immediately following that, the United Steelworkers filed a strike notice. Then on the 20th they both applied for a mediator. I would encourage other people in a dispute to follow this. They applied for the mediator. There were two days of mediation. A dispute mechanism was signed and was ratified within a couple days after that.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

MLA Pensions

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, this mean-spirited government imposes cuts on seniors and children. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Let's have a preamble in the proper atmosphere.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: This government imposes cuts on seniors and children while 28 former Tories responsible for nine consecutive deficits, a \$28 billion debt are collecting \$36 million in lifetime pension benefits from taxpayers. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. Does the Treasurer feel that his former buddies should be collecting fat pensions while the rest of Albertans suffer from the aftermath of their bad government?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should be careful about members of his caucus who may be in receipt of a public-sector pension today. [interjections]

MR. DECORE: Thirty-five million dollars. Thirty-five million dollars.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. Leader of the Opposition. [interjections] Would the Leader of the Opposition please come to order. [interjections] Would the Leader of the Opposition please come to order.

The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MLA Pensions

(continued)

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear that the hon. member across the way should be careful about some of his caucus members who are receiving today a public-sector pension. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. It's obvious that the opposition does not want to pursue this line of questioning.

The hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie.

Paramedic Services

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health, and it's in regard to the changes that will be brought in with the regional funding of health care. The Airdrie paramedic unit is funded by local taxpayers, and we would like to know from an Airdrie perspective if the paramedic unit is going to be impacted on a regional funding basis.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, under the creation of regional areas or areas served for health it is anticipated that there will be a regional authority, a board. What we have asked of the people who are involved in those areas is that everyone who is delivering any type of health service be a part of the discussion. The funding impact would not be on the paramedics. They are not funded by Alberta Health; they are funded in another method. However, we would strongly encourage that they be a part of the discussion at the area level to ensure that the services that are available to the people in health in those areas are best met and that we are not duplicating them or spending dollars unnecessarily to provide a service that may be provided in another way. So certainly we encourage them to be a part of the discussion, but in my view they would not be impacted fiscally.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:30

Judicial Appointments

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want to see the very best men and women appointed as judges, and they want to see those excellent appointments made without any hint, any suggestion of political influence. My question to the Minister of Justice: will the minister agree that from this point on no Member of the Legislative Assembly will be considered for appointment to the bench until at least two years after leaving office?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, the process for selecting judges in Alberta: we have an arm's-length Judicial Council which has the three chief judges of the three courts of Alberta plus the president of the Law Society and two public members who receive applications and interview the candidates. From that pool of recommended people selections are made.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, since the minister mentions the Alberta Judicial Council, my next question is – he's right; the bigger community does have a stake in who's appointed a judge – when will this minister fill the existing vacancies on the Alberta Judicial Council?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, there are two vacancies on the Judicial Council, and the process of filling those spots is under way. There is a review process taking place. There is not a need to have a rapid influx of applications approved. We have well over 150 people that are in the pot ready for selection, and although we have some vacancies, I'm not so sure they're going to be filled in the near future.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, then, to the minister would be: will he agree today to accept the other 14 recommendations from the November 1993 report of the Canadian Bar Association on arm's-length appointment of judges?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Bar Association has brought forward a report and recommendations for selecting judges which they specifically designed for the federal court appointment process. However, the province does live up to that report other than the one issue that the hon. member brought up in his first question. He and I disagree on that particular point, I guess, because I don't think the fact that somebody puts their name forward and is elected by a number of constituents and is serving their constituents taints you in any way from serving, with that experience, on the bench if you are qualified in every other manner. I don't agree with that. I don't agree with the CBA, and I've had the dialogue with the CBA in that regard. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Deputy Premier has advised that he would like to augment an earlier question as a result of information coming to hand.

Distance Learning Centre

(continued)

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to supplement the answer I gave earlier in response to the question from the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury regarding his question about wildly incorrect information that has been published with respect to the Alberta Distance Learning Centre. I indicated that I wasn't sure that in fact there had been some form of correction made in the paper, the *Edmonton Journal*. I have subsequently been informed that in fact there was, and I'd like to file the statement. It's almost impossible to find in the paper.*

As well, Mr. Speaker, in a complete parsimony of prose, the editor chose only to correct one-third of the offending information; that is, mention was made that the 1994-95 improvements are budgeted at \$10,000 rather than \$10 million. Unfortunate that the editor chose not to point out that the facility cost \$9.8 million rather than the outrageous figure of \$120 million that they ran in their article on Saturday. As well, the editor chose not to clarify that this building is nearly 10 years old and continues to leave the impression that this is a new centre.

MR. BRASSARD: I have a final supplementary then, Mr. Speaker. I'm still somewhat confused as to how these articles originate. We're all very familiar with the scrum, but I would like to know just how this misinformation got started in the first place.

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would have to ask the author of the article. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The question offends the rule against asking for opinions.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Seniors' Literacy

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whenever we think of literacy, we usually place the emphasis on learning for earning, but improving one's financial status is only one reason for learning and may be argued to be not the most important one. What about learning for the sheer joy of it? What about learning to become better informed and better able to function in this complicated world that we live in? What about learning to maintain or achieve independence?

In the Statistics Canada survey of literacy skills used in daily activities, 1989, one of the age groups surveyed was the 55 to 69 years group. This survey reveals that 64 percent of older Canadians have some degree of trouble handling everyday demands of reading, writing, and calculating. A reasonable conclusion is that adults over the age of 70 years would have an even higher percentage showing difficulties. Many had no opportunities for learning in their younger years: they lived in rural areas, English was not the language spoken at home, their labour was needed to keep the farm and home going, and there was a perception that women had no need for a higher education. These citizens spent their years as contributing members of society and were never a burden to the system. Their lack of literacy skills in our increasingly print-oriented world leaves these seniors in a vulnerable position.

It is our responsibility to provide access for seniors to learn to read. As far as cost for a seniors' literacy program is concerned, there may not be too much cost. This can largely be done on a volunteer basis, and all that we ask the government for is some encouragement.

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

Teacher Layoffs

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am greatly concerned with the treatment of young teachers by the ATA. In their continuous efforts to hold onto their turf, they are not giving any attention whatsoever to the needs of the students and young teachers. On Friday I met with teachers who were dismayed and frustrated at the method used in choosing who would be laid off. Without recognition of relative worth any teacher hired after '91 was let go. It is unimaginable that every teacher hired after '91 was less qualified to do their jobs than those who were hired prior to '91. It would seem to me that this would be an opportunity to change a difficult situation into something positive by exercising some quality control when laying people off.

The simple road is rarely the best one. At times when a tree needs pruning, one doesn't cut off only the newest, healthy branches nor do they cut off strong, healthy ones. This is a time to trim away the deadwood. In many cases these young teachers are the most energetic, competent teachers in the system. They are excited about teaching and work very hard at creating vibrant learning environments for their students. These are the people who bring fresh ideas and new perspectives to the teaching community. It is a tragedy that they are being laid off for the sake of seniority. There are many cases in which some teachers are merely filling up space, picking up their cheques, and not contributing anything new to education. It is these teachers that should have been laid off to make way for the next generation of quality teachers.

The ATA is well aware that there are many instances when teachers are laid off not based on merit but on the length of employment. It is irresponsible for the ATA to continue to protect mediocrity by insisting that layoffs be done without considering anything but seniority. The ATA must stop protecting its turf and start protecting the interests of students and teachers. Too often the union insists on measures that protect jobs on the basis of seniority without ensuring the quality of teaching by its membership. The ATA must reanalyze its position on this matter before more young, energetic, and more than qualified teachers are unfairly released while other teachers that are not doing adequate jobs are constantly protected and remain employed.

*see p. 306, left col., para. 4

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

2:40 Senior Citizens' Programs

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received numerous phone calls from seniors who are deeply upset about the sudden cancelation of all their benefits if their income is above \$18,000 single or \$27,000 a family. They deserve stability.

One of my constituents, the Rev. Dr. Peter Ream, spoke with deep feeling about the complete loss of sense of security. He began his career earning \$1,800 per year. He raised five children and in addition scrimped and saved so that he would be able to have an easier retirement. That puts him over the \$27,600 limit, and now he'll have to use his savings to replace the benefits wiped out by this recent budget. To begin, he will have to find about \$750 between now and June 30 to pay his house taxes. After July 1 he will have to find another \$64 per month for his health care premium. He will have to pay more for medicine. In addition, there will be an unknown amount for dental care and glasses. The total extra money to be found will be at least \$2,000 per year, more than he was making when he began working. This is a totally unfair burden to be placed on our seniors.

The relative comfort and enjoyment of retirement has vanished, and worry about the future has taken its place. What about next year and the year after? Any security they had is gone. It's hard to see how someone making somewhat more than \$27,000 a year can be considered a wealthy senior. Even the federal government under the Progressive Conservatives used the figure of \$50,000 as a cutoff for old age pensions. Why can't this government use the same figure? Too much has been cut too quickly from the wrong people. This budget is being balanced on the backs of those Albertans who seem unable to defend themselves. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the ordinary seniors in my constituency as well as other Alberta seniors, I would implore the government to raise it to \$50,000 a year.

Point of Order Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park gave indication of a point of order.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm raising a point of order on the question from the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury to the Deputy Premier, which, if I understood the question correctly, was in relation to a newspaper report.

MR. DAY: What's the citation?

MR. COLLINGWOOD: The citation would be 409, and specifically 409(6) and 410(16). I might also just draw the Speaker's attention to *Beauchesne* 323 as well. Specifically in *Beauchesne* 409 the rules of procedure in question period require that the questions seek information about a matter of some urgency which falls within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the . . . Minister to whom it is addressed.

Perhaps the question might have gone to the minister of public works, but clearly the question was inappropriate to the Deputy Premier. It is simply not within his area of responsibility.

In specifically citing 409(6) again let me quote: "A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government." This was a question relating to the veracity and the accuracy of a newspaper report. I think we still have freedom of

the press in this province. As far as I know, I don't think that falls within the responsibility of the Deputy Premier, much as perhaps some other members opposite might like that to be the case. So I give you that, Mr. Speaker.

I also give you 410(16): "Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios." Again, I don't believe that the Deputy Premier is the minister responsible for deciding whether the press articles are good or not good.

Mr. Speaker, I'm in your hands, but I do also want to refer to *Beauchesne* 323. Again, *Beauchesne* 323 says:

The Speaker is bound to call attention immediately to an irregularity in debate or procedure and not wait for the interposition of a Member.

To congratulate you, you have done that and felt necessary to do that on many occasions in today's question period. In fact, you called the Member for Fort McMurray to order; you called the Member for Calgary-West to order; you called the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry to order. I noted that you did not call the Member for Olds-Didsbury to order on something that was a blatant and inappropriate use of question period time. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. The Chair has heard the gist of the hon. member's point of order. Perhaps in the noise in the Chamber the hon. member didn't hear the Chair comment to the hon. member that the question of the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury was not in order. The Chair interrupted when the Deputy Premier attempted to answer that question.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: I did not.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, then, the Chair feels that that should put that point of order to rest. [interjections] Well, the Chair is not prepared to have a further debate on this matter. The matter is closed. A supplemental question was not in order, as was pointed out to the hon. Deputy Premier when he was answering it. [interjections] No. The Chair has made a ruling that that supplemental question was not in order and would like to leave it at that.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Privilege Access to Budget Information

MR. SPEAKER: Before proceeding with the Orders of the Day, there are two outstanding questions concerning privilege that arose from last week. Last Wednesday, February 23, 1994, there were two points of privilege raised concerning access to or release of information allegedly related to the budget, one by the Member for Edmonton-Centre and one by the Member for Calgary-North West. In both cases the Chair was provided with notice in compliance with Standing Order 15(2). Debate on the points of privilege was adjourned until February 28 when the members to whom the points of privilege were directed, the Member for Medicine Hat and the Minister of Transportation and Utilities, would be present in the House.

The point of privilege raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre concerned information that was provided by the Member for Medicine Hat to a school district in that member's constituency outlining the school district's grants for 1994-95. It was alleged that the information provided by the Member for Medicine Hat constituted a breach of privilege as a release of budget information or a contempt of the House on the grounds that the information was not available to all members.

In response to the point of privilege the Member for Medicine Hat stated that he had requested a breakdown of the grants to school boards in his constituency from the Department of Education after the provincial education grants were announced by the Minister of Education on January 18, 1994. He requested that the department apply the announcement about provincial education grants to the school districts in his constituency. He obtained the information and provided it to the school boards in the constituency the following weekend. It is clear to the Chair that this release of information to the school boards did not involve a release of budget information. Even if it was a violation of budget secrecy, which it wasn't, the Chair would refer to *Beauchesne* 31(5), where it is stated that "budget secrecy is a political convention" and not appropriate for a question of privilege.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre submitted, in the alternative, that the release of information by the Member for Medicine Hat was a contempt of the House similar to the situation that led to a finding of contempt by Speaker Carter on May 13, 1993. Contempts of the House differ from breaches of privilege in that the powers, privileges, and immunities of Parliament are well settled, while contempts which may not be the issue of privilege are evolving. The Chair would refer members to the statement of a contempt found in *Erskine May* at page 115 where it is stated:

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

2:50

The ruling by Speaker Carter in May of 1993 related to the breakdown of capital spending on a constituency basis that was made available by a minister to members of the government caucus only. The point raised by the Member for Edmonton-Centre is not the same since in this case it is the Chair's understanding that the information was available and was being discussed between the department and school boards from January 18, 1994, onwards. The information in question was requested by the Member for Medicine Hat from the department and not gratuitously provided by a minister to some members and not to others. There is no evidence that the information requested by the Member for Medicine Hat was not available to any member who requested it or that any member was denied it. Accordingly, I find there is no prima facie question of privilege and no contempt of the House.

Privilege

Access to Budget Information

MR. SPEAKER: The point of privilege raised by the Member for Calgary-North West relates to statements allegedly made by the Minister of Transportation and Utilities concerning the construction of a hospital in the minister's constituency. The Chair would once again refer to paragraph 31(5) of *Beauchesne*, concerning questions of privilege relating to budget secrecy. In this instance there was no funding designated in the budget for the construction of the hospital in the minister's constituency, as evidenced on page 66 of the document entitled 1994-95 Government Estimates: Supplementary Information Element Details. Therefore, the statements allegedly made by the Minister of Transportation and Utilities did not reflect what was found in the budget. There was nothing raised in the House that would indicate that the minister had access to information in his capacity as MLA for Whitecourt-St. Anne that was not available to other members or that he

released such information. Accordingly, I find there was no breach of privilege or contempt of the House as alleged.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all members that questions of privilege are extremely serious matters. When raising such questions, members should exercise care about the information they rely on as the basis for their allegations.

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Bill 203

Citizen's Initiative Act

[Adjourned debate February 23: Dr. L. Taylor]

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

DR. L. TAYLOR: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I spoke on this Bill last time. I'm not sure who's up.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. member doesn't wish to continue, the Chair will recognize the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll continue with debate on this very important Bill and appreciate the opportunity to do so. I'd like to start with congratulating the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw for bringing forward Bill 203, the Citizen's Initiative Act. We will not be the first Assembly to have dealt with this sensitive and difficult issue, and I suspect that we probably will not be the last as well.

If memory serves, the debate on this Bill has all been positive. At this point in time all members that have spoken to this Bill have spoken in favour of the Bill and in support of the Bill. I think, however, that to have a full and complete and energetic debate on this Bill, in fact it would be important to speak contrary of the Bill. I speak against the Bill and do not intend to support this Bill. Now, Mr. Speaker, I hope that other members opposite will participate in the debate, because citizen initiative is indeed a very important issue that has to be discussed. I'm looking forward to debate from the other side so that we can look at all aspects of this particular issue to come to a decision.

I appreciate the reasons why the hon. member is bringing forward Bill 203. I believe it was my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Edmonton that had quite correctly observed that Albertans are feeling left out in many cases. They're feeling that they are not part of the process of government and of democracy and are looking for tools and mechanisms to feel part of the political process. We attempted last year, you'll recall, Mr. Speaker, in the last session to try a different mechanism to bring Albertans and citizens of this province into the political process with a proposal to bring into legislation recall as a method of parliamentary reform. You'll recall, of course, that members opposite chose not to embrace or accept that particular parliamentary reform initiative, although I will state for the record that I recall that the Member for Calgary-Shaw did in fact support the idea of recall in this Assembly. So I do understand why indeed the member is bringing it forward. He very clearly enunciated those reasons in opening debate for second reading and has recognized that Albertans are not feeling that they are getting their money's worth from their Members of the Legislative Assembly.

However, Mr. Speaker, there are other ways to bring Albertans into this process. There are other ways to bring Albertans feeling

more a part of their democratic process than through the member's Bill 203, the Citizen's Initiative Act. The reason why that is was stated by the Member for Calgary-Shaw. We know that in this Bill we can only go to the extent of bringing forward in this Assembly a Bill based upon the opinion of the electorate through the petition process. As the Member for Calgary-Shaw indicated, we are not bound by any Bill that may come forward through the petition process in this Bill that comes to the floor of the Assembly. We can't be bound. We have had previous citizen initiative legislation in Alberta, in other provinces of Canada, and Canada itself. Within the parliamentary system and the representative system that we have, we cannot through direct democracy be bound by any initiative that may come forward by the citizenry. It still requires debate in this Assembly, it still requires three readings, and it still requires the approval of the Lieutenant Governor. Any attempt to bypass that process would be, in my view, unconstitutional and certainly subject to challenge. In fact, the last referendum Act that this province had was repealed on the basis of the Initiative and Referendum Act of Manitoba of 1916 on the basis that the Alberta Act, given its circuitous route around the Lieutenant Governor, would in fact be unconstitutional.

So in Bill 203 we recognize that any Bill coming into this Legislature through citizen initiative will not bind this Legislature. I think that then clearly indicates to Albertans that the Bill is at best ineffective and at worst hypocritical, because what it does is it invites Albertans to participate in the process, only then to have this Assembly deal with this matter or not.

The proposal as put forward in Bill 203 is that the Speaker of the Assembly will put the Bill onto the Order Paper. I don't know for sure, Mr. Speaker, but I doubt very much whether or not a Bill can be introduced into this Assembly through the Speaker's Chair. It leaves open the question then, of course, as to whether or not any Bill coming through under Bill 203 as the Citizen's Initiative Act would in fact come through to this Assembly as a government Bill and then the Whips would be on, or whether it would come through as a private member's Bill subject to a free vote. If it comes through as a private member's Bill, are we bound to debate that as Bill 203? Will it appear on the Order Paper somewhere else? There are many reasons to at least warn Albertans that where this Bill attempts to tell Albertans that you are part of the process, it has to be made very clear that they are only a small part of the process, and nothing that they do and the energy they expend and the effort they make will be binding on this Legislature or will in fact ever get to debate in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, the debate on direct democracy through whatever method and whatever tool and primarily the referendum and plebiscite process has – and the academics have written at length on this – many advantages and many disadvantages. The Member for Calgary-Shaw has attempted to raise some of the advantages of going through a citizen initiative process. Just let me briefly go down a list of what some of the writers have said are the advantages, and then perhaps I can highlight some of the disadvantages.

3:00

On the advantage side, the reason for citizen initiative is that issues that are not favourable to government can get onto the government agenda, and this is really the essence of why citizen initiative is seen as a popular movement. As another advantage, it gets out to the people. It's not simply business being conducted in this Assembly, but in fact it's issues and debates going on in the public domain. It also suggests that the popular view of the citizenry is expressed, not just the view of the elected representative in this particular Assembly. We all know, Mr. Speaker, that we cannot come to this Assembly and bring forward the views of

all of our constituents. We attempt, of course, to bring forward the views of the majority of those. The notion is also that citizen initiative will end apathy and alienation of the citizenry, and that is often stated to be an advantage of this process. A final one that is noted is that issues that must be considered that are difficult and sensitive are done so in the context of the next generation rather than in the context of the next general election.

So those are some of the advantages that are expressed in terms of citizen initiative, but there are a number of disadvantages to citizen initiative as well. I'd like to just highlight those. First of all, obviously – and we have many examples of this whether or not we're talking about referendum or whether or not we're talking about plebiscite. In fact, perhaps just to clarify: referendum of course in federal legislation would be binding on the Parliament; a plebiscite is really just getting an opinion from the people as to how they feel on a particular issue. Certainly a disadvantage of the process is that the outcome of the citizen initiative is unpredictable, again whether that's plebiscite or whether that's referendum.

We've also seen examples where citizens come down on one side or the other of an issue, whether it's in signing the petition or whether it's in fact voting in a particular way on a plebiscite primarily done at the municipal level. There is then often some second-guessing that goes on, and very often you leave open the possibility that there's no clear direction that's been given to you as to how this should proceed and whether or not there's any political consequences of proceeding in a particular direction one way or the other, depending on the outcome of that vote.

One of the most significant disadvantages of citizen initiative is that where at least we in the Assembly can debate issues back and forth, raise amendments, look at many sides of the issue, put the issue aside for awhile, bring the issue back, look at it again, take different perspectives, when you reduce that process to citizen initiative through referendum or plebiscite, you create one of two camps: you're either for it or you're against it. The debate then divides the electorate, and they must then come down on one side of the issue or on the other side of the issue.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we will all remember the national referendum. There were so many issues. There were things that people liked about it; there were things that people didn't like about it. Ultimately, when it came down to making a decision, you were either for the whole package or you were against the whole package. You had no opportunity to deal with that. That can be dealt with in this Assembly. The differences, the nuances, the subtleties can all be massaged. They can all be debated. They can all be looked at individually. But when you go into a referendum, when you go into a plebiscite, you're splitting the community into two: for or against. Nothing in between.

Another concern, and of course we have again all seen this. The debate on a petition, whether or not the matter is going onto the ballot or whether or not there's a special plebiscite or referendum – we know that the debate ends up in the media. That's where people make their decisions on referendums and plebiscites. In many cases the issue is decided by the way the mass media treat that particular issue. We all know, Mr. Speaker, that people are busy. They have families, they have jobs, they have businesses, they have parents. They're busy, and they get their information from the media, rightly or wrongly. What that does is that raises another question. When an issue that's important enough to come forward through citizen initiative is taken through the petition process and then onto a ballot, we've seen this happen: those who have the resources to promote one side or the other of the issue perhaps give themselves an advantage. Those who have the resources and those who have the

money and those who have the public relations people will tilt and sway and use those resources to their advantage as we go into initiative or referendum, a really serious flaw with going to the citizen initiative process.

One of the things that came to mind as a disadvantage of this particular Bill is that MLAs might, if this were now law in the province, get a bit lazy. A constituent could come to the Member for Calgary-Shaw and say, "I want you to deal with this issue in the Legislature." The Member for Calgary-Shaw could say: "If you feel that strongly about that issue, you should start a petition, and for the next 365 days you should collect up to 10 percent of the people of this province, 10 percent in two-thirds of all of the constituencies. I agree that that's a very important issue. So why don't you get on it right away, Mr. Citizen? You bring forward that petition, and I promise we'll probably deal with it in one way or another." Well, it's a possibility. MLAs could abrogate their responsibility to their electorate and say: if you feel that strongly about an issue, deal with it through the Citizen's Initiative Act that we have here. That concerns me, because I think that what this Bill does – and it may not be consciously – is it leaves open the possibility that MLAs who are working hard in certain areas may not take an issue up with their particular constituents and perhaps pass that off to them to pursue in citizen initiative.

The other thing that we have to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, and again this is not a question of right or wrong: we certainly know that issues that are going to come forward through this kind of process are going to be issues that are raised by various interest groups. It would be, I think, unrealistic to suggest that our John Q. Public will be in a position to have the resources and the energy and the time and the inclination to go through the process that's been laid out in Bill 203 and bring forward an issue that is near or dear to their particular heart through this process. We all know that in our own constituencies those phone calls come in, those letters come in. People tell us what's on their mind, but very rarely are those people going to have an opportunity to embrace citizen initiative in this process and initiate that for themselves. So we know that what we're talking about is interest groups taking control of this process and using it to their advantage. Again, as I say, that's not necessarily right or wrong; that's just the reality of the situation, that those are the groups that are going to be using and looking at and relying on that kind of direct democracy approach.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the time line in this Bill, it again, I think, reinforces the hypocritical nature of this. It's telling people, "You can get involved," but when you look at the process, somebody might question, "Well, why am I doing this?" According to the Bill, an individual could raise an issue, and he could then ask that that be looked at. We can get the wording down, and then we can go into a petition. Now, let's assume for a moment that that petition, that issue comes up in the very first year after a general election. What will happen is that that individual will then be given the opportunity under the Act to start collecting names on the petition to reach that necessary threshold to go to the next step. They have a year to do that. This is in the first year after a general election. So they do that for the next full year. Let's say, for example, that they receive the necessary number of signatures on the petition. It passes muster at that level. Then it goes on to the next level.

3:10

Well, the next level is for that issue to come up on the ballot for the next general election. Well, that's three, four years away, minimum. The issue that's burning right now, that's just taken a year to get names on the petition, is now the issue that is going to appear on the ballot in four years. So let's say that the issue does

appear on the ballot in four years. Within that particular period of time all of the other lobbying that goes on, all of the other debate that goes on about that issue – because let's face it; it's going to be an issue that's going to be important to all Albertans – if you're going to get that many signatures and you're going to take that long to get those signatures, it's going to be a topic of debate. Around the coffee table, at the workplace, in the school, wherever you are, it's going to be a topic of debate.

So now we get it on the ballot for the general election. Three years or four years have gone by since the initiative was started, and within that time after the election, let's say, for example, that in fact they pass muster and meet the requirements on the general ballot. So more than 50 percent have voted in favour. Now, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where that Bill must come forward to this Legislature in some mechanism or other. Well, now we've got another four years to deal with that, because there's nothing that says that it has to be dealt with right now, the very first thing, that the business of the House, the agenda of the House, everything has to be put on hold until we deal with the citizen initiative proposal. Well, it could be a matter of one, two, three, four, five years before we actually get to debate in this Assembly that particular issue. So now we've got seven, eight years from the beginning of the process to actually dealing with it in this Assembly. We have to tell Albertans to be fair to Albertans that it could be a matter of seven or eight or nine years before their issue was dealt with.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SMITH: Well, convincing as the eloquent gentleman from the party opposite is, it gives me great pleasure to rise in support of this Bill. The Bill reacts very strongly to the evolution of the democratic process, not only in Alberta but in democracies throughout the world. A former foreign editor of *The Economist*, Mr. Brian Beadham*, is noted – and incidentally, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that *The Economist* is a free market, democratic-oriented publication with over 150 years of history. It said that the citizen initiative to move towards direct democracy is in fact an overdue change and represents a shift in representative democracy to in fact direct democracy.

On what basis is this evolution now occurring? In fact, modern democracy is based on the proposition that every person's judgment about the conduct of public affairs is entitled to be given equal weight with every other person's. Indeed, that's why this side listens patiently day in and day out during question period to hear and watch the conduct in public affairs of the party opposite. However, the concept is not new, Mr. Speaker. In fact, direct democracy springs from the reformation some 500 years ago. The reformation was based on the concept that all were equal in his or her dealings with God. Political evolution now accepts that religious declaration throughout the world.

What do we have presently, Mr. Speaker? Every four or five years there's a mad rush to the doorsteps of Alberta, political issues of that particular moment become campaign benchmarks, voters are wooed, lines are drawn in the editorial sands of Alberta newspapers, all resulting in one single decision made by some 50 to 60 percent of the possible voting public: an election takes place. These newly elected, fresh, sparkling faces combined with the wily, old, seasoned veterans arrive in Edmonton and then make governing decisions for at least the next thousand days. Opposition criticism and indeed opposition support represent constant surrogate opinions of the populace, and they are measured and judged for their support or opposition to government policy. Is this the most effective method to provide Albertans with optimal government representation? Can we find a better

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

way to respond in a more expedient, in a more acute fashion to the needs of all Albertans? A vehicle such as this Bill does exactly that. It provides Albertans with a nonparty, political vehicle to express the needs and views of a rapidly changing society. It sends a very important message to all members of the Legislature when initiatives of this form are undertaken.

As you heard from other speakers, the concept is not new to Alberta nor to Canada. Throughout the world sophisticated democracies have embraced the concept of the citizen initiative or, in a more evolved state, the direct referendum or plebiscite. Direct democracy is throughout the world at present. Australia, France, Denmark, parts of the U.S.A. all have often shown evidence of direct democracy, either referendum based or plebiscite. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the respected *Financial Post* editor, Diane Francis, has described Alberta as the Switzerland of Canada. Quite interestingly, I welcome that description by the noted Canadian economist and, in fact, never really realized how appropriate that description was until I noticed the constant yodeling on certain sides of this Legislature.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, in Switzerland individual freedoms are sacrosanct, and democracy is inviolate. There have been 66 plebiscites taken to the people in the years 1980 to 1990. In Switzerland if you can get 100,000 signatures on a petition, you can insist that any proposal about which one feels strongly must be put to the people's vote. For example, just last year there was a referendum on a proposal to limit armed defence budgets. There was an increase in the petrol tax that was sent to referendum, an increase of 2 percent. Another great use in Switzerland was to limit the growth of immigration when growth was feared by the Swiss. It's really an example of direct management by the people of their Legislatures and of their government. These are results of this democratic evolution. Today in this humble Assembly we speak only of opening the mechanism and allowing the idea to grow and become uniquely Albertan in its evolution to facilitate direct access by Albertans to their political system.

Mr. Speaker, we need this legislation for two compelling reasons. One, quite obviously, particularly in Alberta, the wars of contrasting political grand ideas is over. Governing is primarily economic in nature. The task is to deregulate layers and layers of bureaucratic regulation that have been built up over years of centralized Big Brother type of government. Indeed, today's politics is an exercise in moribund, humdrum detail. We're really arguing about differences in the process, in the ways of spending. The citizen initiative gives us a better way to decide what concepts need to be put forth from direct expression. More importantly, the Citizen's Initiative Act is the first step of defence against special interest groups. It's a first line of defence to the increasingly more powerful political entity, that of the lobbyist. These representations can make representative democracy more and more inadequate. Lobbyists now can react very quickly to situations. They have much more money than ever before. The speed of communications particularly in Alberta with the tremendous growth in distribution of facsimile transfer machines, information highways, courier services, the ability to mount a large and direct campaign against specific representatives can take place quickly and actually quite easily.

3:20

A referendum vote with citizen's initiative and plebiscite votes gives a clear, honest direction to government. It stops the special interest; it stops the lobbyist. After all, Mr. Speaker, it's harder to diddle the many than the few. Well, let's be fair. Let's listen to the voice of the many, the voice of those who have made Alberta strong and not the few individuals who have vested

interests, the search for direct and indirect unelected influence and power. I have such trust and confidence in all Albertans and, of course, particularly those in Calgary-Varsity. There's no longer a great difference in the wealth and education of the voter and their representative. Of course, in the 19th century, in an earlier democracy elected officials were assumed to be the intellectual elite, the cut above the ordinary man. Indeed, my presence here indicates this steady evolution of representation by the common man: the shirt-sleeve Conservative, the individual who wants to represent his area in their best interests. I, for one, need this communication vehicle to better represent my constituents, because it gives me the ability to listen to all the interests, not just those who are the most influential. I have great confidence in Calgary-Varsity and all Albertans. They are, after all, the most educated work force in Canada: over 20 percent have postsecondary education. Their wealth and well-being has multiplied manifold since adapting a British parliamentary model.

As a businessman, Mr. Speaker, if the market changes, it's my responsibility to bring a better, a more responsive, a more acceptable product to that marketplace. We can do that by passing this Bill. We can recognize the brighter, better educated, more informed, indeed the more articulate voters of today. The citizen's initiative is an important arrow in the quiver of democratic representation. It's a solution needed to prepare Alberta for democratic evolution into the 21st century. As differences of wealth, education, and social conditions blend, it is increasingly more difficult to persuade people that most of them are fit only to put an X on a ballot every few years and subsequently that a handful sent to this Assembly can be left to take all the other decisions. People are better equipped for direct democracy than they used to be. The altered character of Alberta's society increases this need for direct democracy. In fact, it's a first line of defence against poor representation. It's a politician's line of defence against special interests and against lobbyists. This Act is a first step to a better, more responsive government for the people of Alberta. After all, Mr. Speaker, Abraham Lincoln continues to say it best: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." I think that when he first said that, he probably got a more rousing . . .

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta voter is the foundation of this democracy. Anything that we can do to raise his or her level of political efficiency is a desired objective. This process, the initiative, will do precisely that and encourage all Albertans, not just the members on this side of the House, to take their politics seriously. As the process evolves, Alberta will have a sharpened sense of political responsibility, a sharpened sense that will go from Keg River in the north to Manyberries in the south. We need this to help Alberta become a better place to live, where individuals are confident in their ability to openly and freely express political thoughts and ideals to their elected officials. I urge all members of this House to take these small initial steps to encourage and provide all Albertans a vehicle of expression that is open, transparent, and direct to their elected Assembly. This House indeed will be less efficient without this Bill. Direct democracy has two great advantages. It leaves absolutely no ambiguity. In referendum form the people clearly state what they want. We have a population with an acute and sharpened sense of political involvement and subsequent responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, democracy is the least bad form of government invented by man. Then let us evolve this process to even better serve those whom we represent. Let us go forward and take this first step to the natural evolution of democracy in Alberta. It will result in the full application of the democratic principle.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to speak in favour of this Citizen's Initiative Bill. I'd like to speak to it, though, in a little different context than what we've heard thus far, and that's through the notion of citizen involvement in public policy development.

I think we all admit that we live in an era when citizens are less connected to policy development, and Charles Bahmeuller in *Civitas* gives some reasons for that disconnection and addresses the whole notion of why citizens are less involved. He states first that there's a growing mistrust of government, and he says there are a number of reasons why that mistrust has developed. It stems from a series of broken promises, where citizen after citizen has heard that there will be no new taxes only to elect a government and find that new taxes are the order of the day. It stems from citizens who are told that there will be jobs created by politicians only to elect those governments and find that there are no jobs created at all. That mistrust grows out of patronage.

MR. SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Maintenance Enforcement

503. Moved by Mrs. Soetaert:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to improve the system of maintenance enforcement in Alberta by examining enforcement procedures and payment schedules in other jurisdictions and implementing those procedures best suited to Alberta.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this motion. Isn't that a surprise?

In almost every case following a marriage breakdown or separation, the standard of living of the children and the custodial parent drops dramatically. A federal/provincial study of family law found about 72 percent of children are cared for by their mothers after divorce. The same study found the standard of living of the parent with children dropped after divorce by 78 percent, while the absent parent, usually the father, saw life improve by 42 percent. A properly enforced system of child maintenance would bring immediate relief to thousands of Alberta families. Given that the Minister of Family and Social Services promises to make parents more responsible, this is one area that has been begging for stronger action from the provincial government.

One of the primary objectives of any maintenance enforcement program should be to make parents realize that each has a legal and moral obligation to support their children. This means that the absent parent must pay proper child support and the custodial parent is equally responsible for ensuring the collection of maintenance when it's not paid voluntarily.

3:30

Despite the improved collection rates purported by the Department of Justice, there continues to be a number of serious flaws in the system. Constituency offices are inundated with complaints from single parents frustrated with their continual fight to receive financial support for their children. Their complaints help to

reveal all that is wrong with this program in Alberta. These parents describe a system that is not user friendly but is rather a bureaucratic maze that treats their telephone inquiries as an unfortunate nuisance. Often a caller only wants to know if a cheque has been dropped off, not an unreasonable request for any responsible parent trying to budget. Rather than answer their questions, these parents are often told that they have now exceeded their quota of two phone calls per month and they can't have any more information. The government seems to have forgotten that the maintenance enforcement program is there to help the custodial parent in their struggle to get child support, yet the experiences described by countless parents reveal a maintenance enforcement program that is anything but helpful.

While the Act may provide the director of the maintenance enforcement program with an array of enforcement measures, there is serious discrepancy and inconsistency in when and how often these measures are applied. Case after case has been reported to our office where one parent had to fight for months to get a garnishee placed, only to have it removed the very next month, all because the debtor parent promised to never again miss a payment. We found several examples where garnishees are lifted, even though the parents have a clear history of failing to pay their child supports. We question whether such promises would work to lift garnishees that are placed for payment of any other debt besides child support.

Constituents also describe a real confusion and anger over the apparent ease with which a debtor parent can apply to have the amount of arrears reduced or even eliminated. In 1990-91 there were 910 cases in which Alberta courts granted reductions, 144 more than the year before. The director has the authority to collect up to 10 years' worth of arrears. He also can wipe out any debts older than three years, virtually wiping out thousands of dollars in child support. Often a parent has to borrow money from family members to make ends meet. That debt is still owed, yet past debts are wiped away.

While the Department of Justice can boast over the increasing rate of collection by the maintenance enforcement program, their stats continually fail to tell the real story and problems with the enforcement system. Their claim that over 81 percent of the files have had successful collection is completely misleading. What the department really means is that 81 percent of the files have had some money collected. It could be as little as 2 cents worth, but according to the department, that means a successful collection. A woman from Red Deer phoned me the other day. She has four children. She received \$50 for last year.

The stats also fail to tell us how many files are in arrears. Unfortunately, to the single mom struggling to survive, these skewed stats provide little comfort. For the real truth on the success of the maintenance enforcement program just ask the hundreds of parents turning to constituency offices, desperate to get their children the financial support they need and deserve.

Whether or not a custodial parent is on social assistance also contributes to the department's inconsistent enforcement measures. The shift of single parents from supports for independence to student loans has led to a growing number of complaints from parents who report a marked difference in the way maintenance enforcement treats their collection problems now that they're off assistance. Since the single parent on a student loan no longer draws a social assistance cheque, there appears to be less incentive on the part of the government to make sure maintenance is paid on time and in full. Go figure. Equally offensive is the complaint described by a Lethbridge family lawyer to a local reporter that the courts are more willing to uphold arrears on accounts

which have been turned over to social services while wiping out the debts owed to women not on assistance.

Discussions about maintenance invariably dredge up complaints about child access. The issues are often raised simultaneously, as if one was dependent on the other. Child access is an ongoing nightmare for thousands of families. Ignored court orders, skyrocketing legal bills, frustrated parents, and children stuck in the middle of a messy divorce are all sufficient reasons for this government to finally resolve the problems with child access. Our caucus recognizes the problems and has been supportive of noncustodial parents who struggle to maintain access with their children. But child support and access are separate issues and must be treated that way. To do otherwise is tantamount to treating the child like a cheque, causing countless calls and problems.

A few final points, Mr. Speaker. In my own constituency office I have received letters from one woman whose husband virtually sold the farm back to his parents so that he would never have to pay support to his children. That's not good enough. This government has to learn to grasp this problem. Band-aid solutions like taking away drivers' licences are not enough. No guts, no glory. Make a stand.

You know, if you took a look at the Australian model – and that's not too far away from New Zealand's, and maybe the government would like to hop across the water and have a look at what Australia does. We're prepared to work with this government to help you recognize the depth of the problem, and we urge this government to start action. Hold some town hall meetings so you can hear men and women to work out a better enforcement plan for Alberta. Longer delays, longer band-aid solutions, the longer our children in our province will have to suffer.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that children are being hurt, and it's time this government takes action.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join in this debate on Motion 503 to discuss the issue of maintenance enforcement. As successful as the maintenance enforcement program is in Alberta, I know that there are still problems with the process of arranging and making maintenance payments. I know this because I receive concerns from constituents, from both custodial and noncustodial parents.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

There are things that can be done to improve the system of maintenance enforcement in this province. Motion 503 proposes that we look at maintenance enforcement programs in other jurisdictions in order to improve our program here in Alberta. This is a useful means of making improvements to the system. It is a good idea, and in fact it already is being done. Alberta has had a well documented success with the program.

The Alberta maintenance enforcement program was created with the help of successful procedures from other programs, and it continues to monitor advances and innovations from other jurisdictions. In that sense, this motion is redundant. Nevertheless, I appreciate that the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has brought forward this motion, because maintenance enforcement improvement deserves continuous scrutiny, debate, and attention. I trust that the minister will consider all ideas brought forward today as suggestions for improving maintenance enforcement in Alberta.

Motion 503 suggests only one of the many ways that we can work to improve the system of maintenance enforcement in this province. Our goal is to place the responsibility of caring for children on the parents, where it belongs, and not on the taxpayer.

The problems associated with maintenance enforcement can be reduced to one concept: responsibility. Parents have responsibility to their children. Parents have responsibility to each other. And society – that is; government, parents, teachers, everyone – has responsibility to make people accountable for and aware of the consequences of their actions.

Maintenance orders are negotiated to require parents to take responsibility for their children even if they are no longer living with them. The maintenance enforcement program exists to encourage people to meet these responsibilities that they may not otherwise meet on their own. Research indicates that maintenance orders tend to be better complied with where enforcement is perceived to be a reality. The success of the program in Alberta ensures that enforcement is definitely seen as a reality in this province. Currently debtors who do not pay can have their wages garnisheed or their property seized.

We do have to get tougher on parents who don't pay child support, and my colleague from Calgary-East will present a private member's Bill to accomplish this. Bill 216 aims to prevent debtors in arrears from being able to renew their drivers' licences or register motor vehicles. It is unfortunate that some people have to be forced to meet their obligations, but the maintenance enforcement program in Alberta does a good job to see that this happens. This program will be aided by this private member's Bill, and I look forward to the debate on this Bill.

3:40

Parents also have responsibilities to each other with regard to making the system of maintenance orders work. While the noncustodial parent, usually the father, has to take responsibility for contributing to the financial support of their children, the custodial parent, usually the mother, also has a responsibility to allow the other parent access to the children. Just yesterday I read a letter from a distraught dad lamenting that there are government bodies to enforce maintenance orders but none to enforce access rights. As a dad who does meet his responsibility of making support payments he is still being denied access to his children. Denying children access to one of their parents can be just as harmful as not providing proper financial support. Access to their children is a serious problem for a lot of fathers. It is another area of concern involving the system of maintenance enforcement that could be improved upon.

Along with the responsibility of making support payments to provide for children is an equal responsibility of ensuring that when it is in their best interests, children have adequate opportunities to see the absent parent. Parties on both sides of the maintenance payment equation must be encouraged to live up to these responsibilities to make the whole system more effective.

Notwithstanding the foregoing comments about the need for better maintenance and improvement of access, I turn my thoughts toward preventative strategies. It is alarming to note the steady rise in the volume of maintenance enforcement cases, from 31,000 in '88-89 to 62,800 cases in '92-93. Perhaps this can be attributed to a more efficient caseload management, but I suspect this indicates an increasing problem. It is simply not an effective strategy to look only at the symptom, the symptom being the number of cases, and address the issue only from the maintenance angle. It would be more effective to address the root issues.

One of the root issues is the relaxed attitude towards sexual relationships that is prevalent today. There is a tendency for

sexual activity at younger and younger ages. Mr. Speaker, there are no exams that people have to pass in order to become parents. Alberta Education promotes simplistic curriculums that presume sexual activity among teenagers and focus on contraception. The message is: do it, but don't get caught. We've underestimated the emotional attachments of sexual involvement and overestimated the physical aspect. Most importantly we have underestimated the social cost that the sexual revolution of the '60s has brought, and now we are paying the price. We cannot afford to condemn another entire generation of kids to pay an even greater cost.

An unlikely coalition of pro-life and pro-choice advocates in the state Legislature of Maryland has embarked on a statewide ad campaign to promote virginity. This idea promotes abstinence as a socially acceptable choice for teenagers. The campaign includes television ads, radio spots, billboards, newspapers, buttons, and a school curriculum all with the message about the importance of abstinence and the need to be aware of all the consequences before you engage in any sexual activity. One poster shows a close-up of a baby's face. The poster says, "It's amazing how many guys disappear when one of these shows up." At the bottom of the poster is a line: "Be a man. Be responsible." Another poster shows a young man holding a baby. It says: "A baby costs \$474 a month. How much do you have in your pocket?" At the bottom of this poster is the line: "Child support. You play, you pay."

Maryland has found that since this campaign has been started the rate of teenage girls giving birth and having abortions has dropped significantly. It follows that these rates would also affect the rate of parents and children requiring maintenance support payments. This is an innovative campaign that could be just as successful in Alberta, not only in decreasing the number of teenagers having sex but also in promoting the acceptability of abstinence prior to committing to a lifelong relationship.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I've shown you the underlying issue, being responsibility. I've talked about the access issue from a noncustodial parent. I've suggested some preventative strategies, and I would certainly endorse a campaign for our children. It would be expedient for this government to reallocate dollars spent on symptom management to preventative management.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the opportunity to follow a speaker who is as provocative as the one we've just heard. The Member for Red Deer-South talks about responsibility and is anxious to see people accept that kind of responsibility and then proceeds to come up with what I can only suggest is, I'm sure, a sincere but misguided view, that if we start dealing with abstinence somehow we're going to solve the problem that Alberta custodial parents have in 1994. You know, it's often said by members opposite that members in the Official Opposition are engaged in social engineering. Well, we've just heard what I think is the most unrealistic, most Utopian sense of how we should restructure this province, one that bears little resemblance to the real needs and the real issues that confront us as legislators and Albertans in their day-to-day lives.

Mr. Speaker, I'm speaking, of course, in support of the motion by the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Before I'd heard the last speaker, I had come in, naively perhaps, assuming that every member in this Assembly – every member – would want to support this motion, because when I looked at it, it required only two things of us. Only two things. The first one was simply an acknowledgement that the system we have now doesn't do the job.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs rising on a point of order.

DR. WEST: Well, no, Mr. Speaker. Under *Beauchesne* 492 I wonder if the hon. member would entertain a question in debate.

MR. DICKSON: No, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, the point I was attempting to make was that it only required two things of members of this Assembly to be able to support this. The first one was simply an acknowledgement that the system doesn't work. I heard in fact even the Member for Red Deer-South acknowledge as much. The second thing it requires of members is simply a will to do better for Alberta custodial parents and a will to do better for Alberta children.

Mr. Speaker, I think that every member in this Assembly must understand the shortcomings in the system we have now. My office gets a significant number of calls. My constituency may be a little unusual in the sense that some 40 percent of the constituents who live in Calgary-Buffalo live below the poverty line; 46 percent of the families in Calgary-Buffalo are lone-parent families. That's easily double the statistics in the rest of Calgary and I suspect in the rest of the province.

I also want to make the point, Mr. Speaker, that it's evident that when we speak about this issue, this isn't exclusively a gender issue. It isn't simply a question of a woman's issue. The Divorce Act itself is clear in using gender-neutral language. In my comments this afternoon I'm going to talk about the payer spouse and the payee spouse, because it does happen that we have women and we have men that have an obligation to pay support. I don't feel constrained simply to talk about child support, because the motion deals with support, whether it's spousal support or whether it's child support.

Mr. Speaker, the motion as it's drawn is very inclusive, and I'm grateful to my colleague for drawing it in that fashion. I think what it does is it raises three separate elements that have to be addressed. The first one is: how is support calculated currently? The second element is: how can support be collected in the case of the payer who is an employee? Then thirdly: how can support be collected in the case of the payer who is self-employed?

3:50

Now to deal with each one of those three elements in sequence. How is support calculated? This is the issue that's not currently addressed in our Maintenance Enforcement Act. It's not currently addressed in our maintenance enforcement program, and it matters not in Alberta whether you're under the Divorce Act, which would include the vast majority of these cases, or whether you're under the provincial law, the Domestic Relations Act, or under the maintenance and recovery Act. In each case support currently is calculated in really one of two ways. One, the two parents or in some cases the Department of Family and Social Services and the other parent negotiate an amount of support. This is speaking in terms of child support. The alternative is the two parents or the two parties coming to an agreement in terms of what the support should be. But it's clear that even in those cases where there's a negotiated settlement, the negotiated settlement is largely

driven and conditioned by an expectation of what the court would do if the matter were litigated.

Let's just spend a moment looking at that process. All we're talking about now, members, is how the quantum of support is fixed. Now what happens is the custodial parent, if we're talking child support, has to retain a lawyer. What happens is that you can't in Alberta, typically, simply ask for support unless you already have some sort of an ongoing matrimonial cause. So you go to the lawyer and you start a divorce action or an action under the Domestic Relations Act. What happens is that in that case you want to get interim support. An application then has to be made to a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench in chambers. That means affidavit material has to be prepared and exchanged between the two parties. It may mean that there's a cross-examination by lawyers of each of the two parties on their respective affidavits. The next thing that happens is you have to book a time for a chambers application. In the normal course you only get 10 minutes on a weekday morning in Edmonton or Calgary, and it's the same process in all other Queen's Bench circuits.

What have you? You have 10 minutes, and in that 10 minutes the two lawyers have to work their way through and take a judge through typically 20 pages of affidavit material. The affidavit material has attached to it tax schedules and detailed expense statements and income statements. We expect, the way the system works now, that a judge who comes in cold, never having seen anything about this case before, never having seen any of the affidavit material, will sit down and in the space of 10 minutes with no prior opportunity to read the material, listens to the two lawyers, somehow reads the affidavit material and then is expected to set an amount of support.

We have a problem with that in another respect, sir. What happens is that you often have judges – we've got something like 72 judges of the Court of Queen's Bench in this province. Seventy-two. If each one of those judges takes a slightly different slant, a slightly different focus on the question of child support, it's not surprising when I tell you that it's been often noted that there's a variance in these support orders. It's sometimes tough to reconcile two different orders on roughly comparable facts situations. In fact, it's a point that was made in a Department of Justice survey looking at spousal support in the spring of 1992, and I'd just quote the one observation.

In a study for the Department of Justice Canada, Professor Carol Rogerson has reviewed all reported cases that interpreted and applied the support provisions of the Divorce Act. Rogerson found that there was a lack of consistency both in terms of the principles applied and the amounts awarded. Similar factual situations resulted in very different judgements.

That's one of the problems we have with the system now, Mr. Speaker. It's been determined time after time that judges often tend to have an unrealistic view or expectation of the costs of raising a child or children in 1993-1994.

The other problem is one of cost. If you're a custodial parent, to get to the point of having even an interim order, you've easily spent between \$1,000 and \$3,000 simply to go through the process of having the chambers judge make an order. What we've got, then, is a situation. It's expensive; it takes time. If you can't get in the normal chambers list, you have to book a special chambers application, and that may be three to six weeks down the road. So it's expensive, and usually the person paying that is a mother who's hard-pressed to meet the expenses of herself and her children without any other considerations. That person now has a substantial additional cost. It takes time to get to that point. Then the third thing, as I'd mentioned before, is

you have inconsistency. So you have unpredictability. People often don't know what the support is going to be.

Now, it's sometimes said in this Chamber that there aren't constructive suggestions made from members on this side. That's demonstrably false, but I simply raise it because here we are again, Mr. Speaker, offering a positive suggestion in terms of a way we could do better: much, much better in this province.

I took the Member for Red Deer-South to say that we don't want to look too closely at models in other jurisdictions, that somehow it's best if we're untainted from what they do in other areas and we try to develop the solutions ourselves. Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect, I think we'd be foolish not to look at models that work. If you look at what's happened in Australia, they have a model there that we'd be foolish not to look at carefully.

There are two stages to the Australian model. The first stage is that support is collected not in the fashion here, where you need an individual case where somebody has to get a continuing attachment order or you find out what assets are owned by the payer spouse and then certain steps have to be taken to be able to attach those assets. In Australia what they've done is they've said: we're going to make this real simple; we're going to treat child support in exactly the same way that we're accustomed to treating income tax. It's withheld at source and directly remitted. You don't have to go through a whole lot of other business with the maintenance enforcement office and specific orders and specific continuing attachments. It's all done, and it's simply treated as an at-source deduction. What they found in Australia – and Australia before embarking on this new process a number of years ago in fact had exactly the same system we had. They perhaps were a little more responsive to the complaints that my colleague who moved this motion referred us to earlier. They came up with a system that addressed that. Mr. Speaker, what's exciting about the system in Australia is it works.

I had a chance last year to talk to the director of the Australian support recovery plan. He talked about a lot of the resistance, and he talked about people that were uncomfortable with this kind of automatic deduction process. You know, he told me that when people saw how well it worked, the costs that were saved – and not just costs in terms of collection but the costs to the social service budget, all kinds of indirect costs in terms of legal costs and that sort of thing – those things were avoided and reduced dramatically. I think Albertans deserve nothing less, Mr. Speaker, nothing less.

Mr. Speaker, there's a second interesting feature in the Australian model. I talked before about the process of people having to go through this expensive, lengthy process to be able to determine what the amount is. In Australia what they've done is they've said: we're going to simplify this. What they did is: based on the income level of the family, they set up six columns, if you will, that are basically a graph or a chart. If you're a couple and you've decided to separate and the issue comes up how your child support is going to be determined, you simply look at the chart. It's based and it's driven on the income of the family pre-separation, and there are six different categories depending on the sort of life-style the family had pre-separation. You find where you are on that list, and that tells you very precisely what the amount of support is going to be, whether it's one child, and it's keyed to factor in if there's more than one child in the family. Mr. Speaker, there may be good reasons why we decide not to implement all of it. There may be problems in going that step, but all the motion in front of us asks of each one of us is to explore that kind of alternative. As I say, this goes into an area

that's probably more problematic than this very narrow focus of just how do we do a better job of attaching the assets of a payer parent.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I said initially that the second question we had to address was how can support be collected in the case of the payer who is an employee. Well, I mentioned the model pioneered in Australia. We've also seen it in Wisconsin. Now in Ontario they've gone not with the formula method of determining support, but they've certainly gone with the automatic attachment of wages at source. And the Ontario model works. What's more, they had an aggressive public relations campaign, not as the Member for Red Deer-South suggested a moment ago in terms of promoting abstinence, but rather promoting responsibility, and I thought that was the matter that government members were particularly keen on promoting in this Chamber: responsibility of parents. Well, here is a campaign in Ontario that was able to show dramatic improvement after a three-month public awareness campaign, a dramatic increase in the response rate and the compliance rate, something that we should be concerned with trying to emulate in this province.

The third question then: how can support be collected in the case of a payer who is self-employed? Mr. Speaker, since automatic deduction at source isn't available then, which I understand one of my Calgary colleagues is introducing a Bill on, now we get into the area at last where the minister is talking about some tinkering and some modification to the existing Maintenance Enforcement Act. But I just have to go back and say that if we really want to do a job for Alberta children, we have to look at those first two questions. Until we do that, we can be accused of only tinkering and fiddling around with detail. At the very strongest it simply means some minor improvement in terms of the efficacy of the collection process.

In terms of the self-employed payer spouse, we have to spend a moment and look at the tools and the process now in the Maintenance Enforcement Act. You know, members, the Act provides a very comprehensive array of tools. I mean, there's quite an arsenal there available for use by an aggressive maintenance enforcement office. Now, I should just back up and say that the comments I'm going to make about the maintenance enforcement office don't mean a criticism of the current director, who I think is working hard, or the staff, who are working hard. But it's clear that this department can only do what they're able to do with the resources provided by the government. I think what you'll find: you can have the best statute in the world, and you can have the most impressive array of tools and remedies, but if you don't have the resources to be able to make those tools work, it's a cold comfort to custodial parents and payee spouses.

I think one of the things we can do is look at the default hearing provided in section 22 of the Maintenance Enforcement Act. It's not very effective now. We don't have enough default hearings. When we do have a default hearing, the payer spouse is brought in, the lawyer is there with very little background information, attempts to cross-examine the person and, hopefully, elicit some information about assets which to that point hadn't been disclosed. The observation has been made to me before, Mr. Speaker, and I share it with members of this House, that if we were to spend the dollars to provide an investigator who would be able to assist that government lawyer in the default hearing, we could probably pay that person's salary 10 times over. And I believe that, because if you don't have information in terms of the payer spouse's assets, we simply never get to the point, then, of being able to determine what else is there.

Mr. Speaker, I think another thing we can do is look at this whole process of how Albertans get information about their file. One of the great frustrations for payee spouses is that they can't get information from the government office. They don't know whether a cheque has been received, to then know whether they're waiting and will likely see something in two weeks' or three weeks' time. So we have to be able to do better in that respect too. I think the motion specifically addresses the matter of support. I think it raises the question of how support is calculated as well as how it's to be paid.

I think all members have to be mindful of the need to address also the question of enforcement and time sharing. As the Member for Red Deer-South said, there are ongoing problems with custody and access. The courts have said and the Divorce Act is clear that there are two stand-alone issues, but for anybody who's had experience in this area, we are going to have to do something to address the question of custody and access. I think we can do a better job for the 47,653 children who currently rely on the maintenance enforcement program.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Bow Valley.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to assure you that there will be no cheque presented in this speech today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure that I have been given the opportunity to rise and speak to Motion 503. Just for the benefit of the members who may not have Motion 503 in front of them, I would like to read from it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to improve the system of maintenance enforcement in Alberta by examining enforcement procedures and payment schedules in other jurisdictions and implementing those procedures best suited to Alberta.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would be very hard-pressed not to be able to support a generic statement like that. I feel that it would be very vain of us and very conceited of us as a government. It would be very vain and conceited of the Liberal Party as an opposition in any way to suggest that they have a perfect method for collecting all maintenance enforcement.

This is a topic that is very dear to my heart. As a medical doctor I have a lot of single moms who have a very difficult time obtaining maintenance payments from their estranged spouses. I think it is imperative that we as a government and the Liberal Party as opposition work together in any attempt to encourage and enforce that all maintenance payments are given to the eligible spouses and, more importantly, to the eligible children. I think that is what this whole motion is about.

I would like to congratulate the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert for bringing this motion forward. One point that I would like to refer to, though, is in her statements where she was comparing maintenance with child access. I give a direct quote. It says that comparing maintenance enforcement to child access "is tantamount to treating the child as cheque."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if it would be okay, I would like to read a letter to editor that appeared in one of the daily papers yesterday, and I quote directly.

With all this attention being focused on making "deadbeat" dads pay up, there is one important thing being overlooked - there are loving, caring, supportive, and yes, paying dads.

Don't misunderstand me, if a dad is not paying, with money and time, I, for one, would like to introduce him to Lorena Bobbit. I'm not sure quite what that means.

But if he is, and is being denied his access rights, what government body is there to fight for him, to enforce his rights? None. Why? Well, because the money to support the children, if the father doesn't, comes out of the government's pockets, in the form of welfare; therefore, the government is willing to get involved on the mother's behalf.

But because the only people to suffer, if the mother denies access, are the father and the children, nobody is willing to get involved. I have three children who I love with all my heart and soul, who have been wrenched out of my life both by the divorce and with the added benefit of distance.

Their mother moved them 750 miles away, and out of my reach. I pay, believe me, I pay. I pay a very adequate monetary amount, but I pay with something much more valuable - my heart. It is in a jail, bound, by a controlling, vindictive, spiteful mother, for at least the next 10 years. So, as I said, what about my rights, who is going to speak up for me?

That is signed Ted Turgeon.

4:10

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, are you prepared to table that?

DR. OBERG: Yes, I am.

I would ask the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to explain to this gentleman how the issue of child access is tantamount to treating a child as a cheque.

Mr. Speaker, I would also draw to the attention of the hon. member across from me that there is a Bill 216 coming forward, being put forward by the Member for Calgary-East. At this time I would state to her that if she brought forward any reasoned, apolitical amendment to this Bill, I would certainly support it with all my abilities and that I would support it in any Legislature at any time, because I do feel it is an important concept that we have to consider. With that I would also ask that the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert withdraw her motion until the time that she can support Bill 216.

Thank you.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support the motion from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Just to respond to the last speaker, I would see no reason that this motion should be withdrawn at this time. It seems to me there's no incompatibility, no conflict here. I think it's important for the Legislature to pass this motion. When the Bill comes forward, hopefully there will be amendments put to it as well. This motion in fact would reinforce bringing forward the Bill and amending it, if that seems appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, no credit to us, the divorce rate in Alberta is the highest in Canada. The statistics tell us that in 1990 we rang up 343.5 per hundred thousand, the Canadian average being 294 per hundred thousand. This doesn't really speak too well for our efforts at family support or responsibility. The speaker from Red Deer-South mentioned it, and I believe we have to put our minds to the causes as well. With regret this government appears at this point in time to be cutting back on programs that would support families and help them to resolve differences, to stay together. Frequently families break up over unemployment, lack of money, family stress, abuse. These are the kinds of programs that I believe we have every reason to support and would prevent much of the family breakup that occurs at this point in time. So I plead with the government to put their minds to prevention of this soaring divorce rate in our province.

I expect almost every member of this House will have had some experience within their own family, close friends, and acquaintances that they can relate to in this regard. These experiences are often tragic for many of us. It's a common problem, and it's becoming more prevalent. Of course, Mr. Speaker, it takes two to break up a marriage. It takes two to make one. My sweet husband of 48 years not too long ago said to me, "I don't know what it is we're doing, but we must be doing something right."

Few divorces are amicable. Some of them are solved reasonably, but few are amicable. There is an environment of confrontation in divorce and separation that leads to anger, hostility, and often vindictiveness. All parties get hurt, particularly the children. But, Mr. Speaker, we're talking here about where there is a divorce, there's been a court hearing, and there's an order by the court for something to be pursued, and it is not working. We need to have a better system to make it work. How come there are no real penalties? How come? That would not prevail if it were something other than child support.

The situation is a pretty clear one. It's obvious that 72 percent of children of divorced marriages are cared for by their mothers. As the member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert indicated to us, the standard of living of the parent who has custody of the children generally drops by approximately 78 percent, while the absent parent, usually the father, had an improvement in his standard of living by 42 percent. One says, "Well, is that fair?" The Member for Calgary-Buffalo spoke to the need for a more equitable and consistent formula in how the support payments are worked out.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation for the MEP came in just before I did. It came into this province in 1985. I was privileged to work with some of the groups of women, in particular, but there were a good many men who were equally involved and concerned about the situation. These were groups who urged the government to develop a maintenance enforcement program. This was one of the last provinces to have one, and there were many models from which to choose. We were relieved and pleased that the government saw fit to enact legislation in that spring and to put a program in place. It has developed very well over the years, but, sadly, the numbers that they have to deal with have increased very dramatically.

Mr. Speaker, in divorces it's a difficult emotional time, and arriving at a settlement is difficult. Sometimes it is peremptory. Sometimes families so eager to be out of it make wrong decisions and arrive at a settlement that is not appropriate over time. We see in the application of the government that it doesn't work, so we need to review the legislation, the regulations, and the program immediately.

Mr. Speaker, this is a relatively modest motion. This doesn't ask for a great deal. It simply suggests that it's time for a review, and I would say that after nine years of experience that's not unusual, not unlikely, to expect that in nine years we have sufficient working time now and experience to tell us what needs to be changed.

The inconsistency is one thing that troubles me greatly, not only in the formula that is used or not used to decide what the payment will be but inconsistency in how it is applied, inconsistency in how the applicant, the payee, is dealt with by the maintenance enforcement program itself. That has already been attested to. Mr. Speaker, what happens when the cheque doesn't get there? What happens when the individual is desperate to know, "Is the cheque there?" The individual phones the maintenance enforcement branch and perhaps is told, "No, you can't get an answer." I don't know what that would do to me as a parent responsible for a number of children.

4:20

And in many, many cases this is repetitious. It doesn't just happen once. It happens many times over time. The department goes after the payer. He comes up with it that month. It's a little late, but he eventually comes up with it. But it continues to happen. It increases that sense of desperation on the part of the payee. In the meantime if there is no cheque, the payee goes on welfare. When the payer comes up with the arrears, the woman - it's usually the mother - comes off welfare, and then she has to pay the welfare back. This is a roller coaster, and it is not an appropriate way for us to expect parents to raise families. So, Mr. Speaker, there are too many loopholes in how the system is working, too little consistency, too little consistency in the interaction between social assistance and maintenance enforcement for those who are either on social assistance or those who are not.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

We have had numbers of complaints in my constituency office that the department is not friendly to the user, that there are quotas on phone calls, that there is resistance to pleas for more aggressive attempts to recover payments. Other speakers have already referred to the fact that when the department reports, they show us astonishing success in 81 percent collection, but it doesn't tell us how much. The 81 percent doesn't say what the results were to the individual, and I suggest and submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that that's quite misleading. The reality of the situation is that in a number of cases - we hope they are not in the majority - where parents are consistently in default, the situation becomes one of desperation for the parent who is trying to support her children.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill that has been presented by a private member that was attested to before regarding licences, I suggest is not nearly tough enough. I'm not sure that it will lend itself to the kind of amendments that we believe are necessary in order to effect the remedies and for what needs to happen.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has spoken to the formula. I suggest to you as well, sir, that we forget the cost of raising children in this year, that this changes, that often a variance needs to be applied for by the mother where the cost of raising of children has changed very dramatically, and the circumstances of the payer probably have changed as well. The other thing I think we forget is that children grow up and payments cease. I know these years seem interminable to many, to the person who is paying, but children in fact do grow up.

I appeal, Mr. Speaker, for consistency, for a system that is user centred, for a system that applies the Ontario or Australia model of payroll deduction for people who are employed, for a review of pay during variance applications. I think we need to look very carefully at whether or not the whole system should be revamped to have the government make the payments that are ordered by the court, and then the government would collect from the payer. That seems to me to be ultimately the fairest one. Why should the payee have to change life-style while the variance is in court? Often very, very time consuming. Why not certified cheques? I've never understood that. It seems to me that's a simple one that could be done very easily.

Just one second, Mr. Speaker, to speak to the question of access, which I see as something that we need to resolve in this Legislature. It really is a separate issue and should be resolved separately.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just close by saying that I'm anxious that we be responsible legislators, and I ask every member to support this motion.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The time provided under Standing Order 8 has expired, and therefore the Chair must put all questions in order to conclude consideration of this matter. All those in favour of Motion 503 as proposed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

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

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abdurahman	Henry	Sekulic
Beniuk	Hewes	Soetaert
Bracko	Kirkland	Taylor, N.
Bruseker	Langevin	Van Binsbergen
Carlson	Leibovici	Vasseur
Chadi	Massey	White
Collingwood	Mitchell	Wickman
Decore	Nicol	Yankowsky
Dickson	Oberg	Zariwny
Germain	Percy	Zwozdesky
Hanson	Sapers	

Against the motion:

Black	Gordon	Mirosh
Brassard	Haley	Paszkowski
Burgener	Havelock	Pham
Calahasen	Herard	Renner
Cardinal	Hlady	Severtson
Clegg	Jacques	Smith
Coutts	Kowalski	Sohal
Day	Laing	Tannas
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor, L.
Evans	Magnus	Thurber
Fischer	Mar	Trynchy
Forsyth	McClellan	West
Friedel	McFarland	Woloshyn
Fritz		

Totals: For - 32 Against - 40

[Motion lost]

head:

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

- Moved by Mr. Dinning:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate February 28: Dr. West]

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up where I'd left off the other day. I was leading into the reasons why it's so important that we balance our operational budgets, that again, as I said that day, you cut your coat according to your cloth. You have certain revenues coming in. You have certain obligations. You balance those out. I did point out that many of us in this

Assembly and lots of other jurisdictions have long-term debts, but it's important first to balance your budget on a day-to-day basis and then work on your long-term debts. Again I had pointed out that, you know, anybody with a house couldn't go on spending more than they could afford to without making the payments on their house if they had a mortgage. I think that example has to be applied to government today.

As I had talked the other day, I had alluded to the policies of the Liberal government back in the '60s and '70s, of how we had built up a time and tolerated a time where we had double-digit inflation, interest rates being charged to people trying to run businesses and that of 22 percent while at the same time we were tolerating paying out interest on savings of anywhere from 12 to 19 percent, while at the same time the government of the day kept the taxes low.

4:40

I was trying to point out what a fool's game that was that the Liberals played, because it led us into the infrastructure problem that we have today. We have these massive social services developed under that social engineering of the Liberals of the day. We're still funding them without having changed the structure, but now the federal government wants to raise the taxes rather than restructuring government, exactly the opposite to what we're doing in this province.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has a point of order.

MR. WICKMAN: Would the minister entertain some questions?

DR. WEST: Absolutely. Go ahead, my dear friend.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, let me start. I have several of them here. Let me start. [interjections] Just one? Okay.

Mr. Speaker, what does the member think that the former Premier was doing in the last few years, when virtually every facility throughout this province was approved, including this, this, this, everything? What does the member think the Premier was doing? [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

DR. WEST: If the member had been listening to my lead-in to these comments on the budget, he would have noted I did acknowledge that during the period that I was elected, from '86 till now, we didn't have either the resolve or the focus or the ability to deal with self-interest groups or the structure we'd put in place and that we had continued to balkanize problems. But on June 15, with a mandate from the people of Alberta, under a promise to do only one thing, balance the budget, we have started to refocus and get on with it. I'll be the first with anybody to admit that governments, including the government that I was part of in 1986 and the federal governments before and after, have not been able to put their politics aside and to focus on the principle, as I said, the rule of worth: cut your coat according to your cloth. We had all been entrapped by the philosophy of politicians

that it was better to give than receive, that it was never right to say no, and that you never restructured something that you had invented.

So I'm answering your question honestly. You're right that all governments up until this one, as stated by the *Globe and Mail*, never had the political steel to step into the arena and do what is right and then go the people in four years and ask them: "What do you think? We have run the government just as we've asked you to run your households, to run your businesses, to run your farms, to run your personal lives."

Debate Continued

DR. WEST: You know what, Mr. Speaker? Following this budget and continuing that focus and achieving that goal, I'll lay my political career down on the line in four years. I respect the vote of these people, and we'll see what the people of Alberta want for their future and what vision they have.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest to the brother of a great Liberal from the west coast, our minister here, talk about how he was strayed from the family advice and turned out a Tory. It is interesting to note – you've got to give him credit in a couple of areas, having courage. I think I would probably give that to the whole government over there, because so far they have actually bought the whole idea that if you cut spending, you bring prosperity. Now, it's intriguing that they always use examples of countries that have overspent, like New Zealand. The very fact that Great Britain, a great consumer of the New Zealand market, joined the European Common Market and therefore the markets dried up and therefore they went broke, that's immaterial. They just argue that it had something to do with their spending.

Nobody uses Norway, for example, which we've seen, with the Olympics, on TV sets and so on the last while, which is definitely a state that spends money to help their poor and their weak and their farms. It's probably one of the happiest and most prosperous societies in the world, with a suicide rate that's only 10 percent of what New Zealand's is, yet they're from Nordic peoples. Nobody uses that as an example. But I will give this government credit. They're going to experiment. I hope they don't blink. I hope they stick with it.

This is very, very interesting because, I argue, Mr. Speaker, there are two types of money spending a government can do. One of them is what this government was in the past most guilty of: that's getting into business, whether it's NovAtel or northern canola or something. Many of the governments of the past – not these people particularly, but the old government, and you remember, Mr. Speaker; you're of an age, had gone to university with these other people, and when the people graduated in the boom times of the era, they went out and made money. In other words, you couldn't lose money in business. So it was very easy for any government of the day – and the Liberals were just as bad as the NDP and the Conservatives in those eras – to think that any klutz can make money, so let's get in and buy things and get into business ourselves because we're all going to make money. When it turned around and went the other way . . .

DR. WEST: Six hundred Crown corporations in Ottawa.

MR. N. TAYLOR: . . . you have a little trouble.

Veterinarians are like that, because they're always used to something wiggling in front of them there, Mr. Speaker. I would

advise the hon. member to use his ears rather than his mouth for a short while.

To go on a bit, there was this idea that you could make money no matter where it was, and governments got into business. Of course, the Tories got into more business than most because they were selling our oil and gas. Great money right, left, and centre. They had to have something to do with it, so they got into business. Naturally, that is one type of dollar, and when that dollar is spent, nine times out of 10 it doesn't stay in the economy. Like NovAtel, it went into finders' fees and U.S. loans and so on and fled the country.

But when you put a dollar into social services or when you put a dollar into senior care, 99 times out of 100 it stays in your economy. In other words, seniors and particularly people on social services and single parents do not bury their money in a jar in the backyard. It does not just disappear; it comes right back into the economy. I would defy the hon. member that even in his own town his own veterinary practice probably would fold up if it wasn't for social services money coming in at that lower level that admittedly buys groceries, maybe the odd drink of beer or anything else. That enriches the next level up, who in turn have the money to buy the exotic horses and cows that our friend made his living on.

MR. SPEAKER: The trickle-up theory.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yeah, that's right. You call that the trickle-up theory, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad you gave me my line. It is the trickle-up theory. Tommy Douglas talked about the trickle down; I talk about the trickle up. Okay. Very good. Very good.

I'm old enough to remember the little communities of Flin Flon and all across the north before social services came in. They were hard-pressed, tight economies, but when government money came in and that money went in, suddenly there were car dealers, suddenly there were nice restaurants, not because the social services directly went to those areas . . .

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MR. HLADY: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View rising on a point of order.

MR. HLADY: Actually, I was wondering if the member would entertain a question.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Certainly. Coming from that member, it certainly will be entertainment.

MR. HLADY: Is the hon. member suggesting that the way you create economy and stimulate the economy is by putting in taxpayers' dollars?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Exactly. He is slowly getting it. Being on the end of the bench, I didn't have hopes, because sometimes you have to pull their ears apart so the idea drops in.

Debate Continued

MR. N. TAYLOR: So, very definitely, at a certain income level those people are not contributing to society. I've lived in India, and I've lived in Pakistan, south Asia, and everywhere else. There is a level where there's no government money coming in, and they're not contributing to the economy, outside of children

maybe. That's all they contribute to the economy. In other words, there are people in your economy that don't contribute, so putting money out to give them a certain standard of dignity comes back in, and it sticks in your pocket, it sticks in my pocket, and it sticks in most of the people's pockets here. That's one type of money. Even the hon. member from where I was born and where rattlesnakes had their ribs showing makes his money from cleaning seed from poor farmers that don't pay tax.

Point of Order

Improper Inferences

DR. L. TAYLOR: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. L. TAYLOR: Yes, certainly. Standing Order 23; *Beauchesne* 484, 69, 92 to 99; Standing Order 13. The hon. member suggested I make my money by seed cleaning, cleaning seed from poor farmers. I certainly do not do anything of the sort. I don't even come close to a seed cleaning plant, so I would ask him to withdraw that comment, which is certainly not true.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I'm sorry. I definitely withdraw it, because obviously I insulted a bunch of seed cleaning plant owners when I put him in with them. Far be it from me. I wouldn't want to do that whatsoever.

4:50

Debate Continued

MR. N. TAYLOR: I wanted to get at that there are two types of money that the public spends dollars on. One goes out and comes right back into the economy again and does everyone good. There's no such thing as a dollar rotting or disappearing or that. The other is the type of dollars – and this government is, well, gun shy of it – that disappear out of the economy. Now, this is what this budget and this government do not really realize: the difference. They've gone about and said that a dollar is a dollar. Well, a dollar isn't a dollar, Mr. Speaker, and anybody in business can tell you that. A capital gains dollar is different from a depreciation dollar, which is different from an income dollar, which is different from a royalty dollar, which is different from a resource dollar, which is different from a farm dollar. Carter was the last one that tried to say that a buck is a buck many years ago – I know this was ahead of the times – and we threw that system out. Dollars are different. Currency is treated differently. A dollar that goes to welfare and goes to social services comes back and ennobles and keeps the economy going.

Now, the only thing you can say against it: it might sap the will and the energy of that recipient to go on to become another Rockefeller. But how can you say to a single parent with little children at school that it is sapping the ambition of those children, that they would be better off having to go without shoes or having to go without the other education that everyone else has? How can you pick on them and say that? Sure, if you're free, white, and 21 – or even free, any other colour, and 21 – and voting Tory, you have a right to get out there and swim with the other sharks, but there are a lot of people in our society that can't swim with the other sharks. That money goes out there, it gives them some standard, and that's how it distinguishes us from the animals. As a matter of fact, some animals, like wolves and that, would be ashamed of us, the way we treat those that are indigent and those that can't look after themselves, the way this budget will look after them.

Anyhow, that kind of money, the money that we're talking about – this is one thing that the party in power in Ottawa seems to have realized and this government hasn't: there is a type of money that increases and enhances the economy; there is a type of dollar, though, that doesn't. Now, putting dollars into businesses, as this government has done – and I hope you dry it up. Unfortunately, when I look through the budget, \$20 million – and I hope the Member for Fort McMurray isn't here; he'll beat heck out of me if he is – to one of the seven big sisters to do research. Now, if that isn't taking coals to Newcastle, I don't know what is. Poor old Shell, with the elbows out of their coats, you know, wandering along – they could buy and sell Alberta anytime of the week – worrying about a \$20 million grant. The only reason a large corporation – and I used to be a vice-president of one of them, Mr. Speaker – wants government money is the same reason you marry the landlady's daughter: so you get the best bed in the house and the first pork chop. It's to bring a partner in. They don't need the money. All they want is your partnership and your love and your protection, and by getting your money, they get it.

So this is the type of money we're talking about. But when it comes to a senior citizen, or when it comes to someone that is suffering on social services or a single parent, oh, no. I mean, Shell's worth the money. We've researched, but we can't give it to them. So this shows you how warped we are. Now, this is warped, but there's no question that we'll see that as time goes on. I've got to give the credit to that group of lemmings over there as they charge forward to the next election. We're going to see who's right. They may be, but I don't think so, because they're saying that any dollar spent in the social services field will not bring it back. That has me bothered.

Now, money – and this is where we would look at it, if we were in power, if we were doing anything: money going into businesses and so on and so forth. They say that they're going to create the climate to help small business. Well, one of the ways you do that is to reduce taxes to small business. One of the ways you do that is the Treasury Branches, for instance, loaning money for longer than 90 days on your accounts receivable. Most people who are in business today know the big corporations hide on paying their bills by taking three, four, and five months to pay them. The members on the northern seats, go ask your Cat contractors, go ask your truckers how long they have to wait for a bill to be paid by a major company. Even ask Medicine Hat. Down there they're even slow. That's bad. They wait months and months because the banks will not discredit. This is how you get the economy in, by regulatory rules and changes that help them in their funding and help them get under way in business.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, talking about the philosophy that's coming through. This is going to be very interesting. In some ways, although it creates a lot of suffering out there, it will be interesting to see whether the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and his brothers succeed in this idea. My own feeling is – and I think a good many economists would back me up. There's a lot of reading on this, and I'm not that unfamiliar with economics, although economists are great faddists. I'm so old now that I can remember about three trends. When I first came out of university, it was be careful, just as it is now. Then I went through the '60s: borrow all you can. I can remember my banker saying: "Gee, Taylor, why don't you use all your borrowing power, because the money's inflating so badly? Borrow all you can because you're paying back with cheaper dollars." Now the economists at university have all rolled over to supply management again, no managed economy. It goes in cycles. If you live long enough, it will come back again.

So it's going to be very interesting to see if by cutting welfare and social services and so on, by cutting that spending level, they create more unemployment than they create employment. This is the thing to remember, because what kind of an atmosphere is there? Today I read the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the CFIB. They mentioned that what was happening they couldn't understand. There was a bit of a recovery, but no job recovery. There's no confidence out there. Well, the reason there's no confidence out there is that this government is cutting off the consumer spending level. You're not spending money, but you're cutting off jobs at the same time. Sure, cut off NovAtel; cut off some of these other big private organizations; maybe privatize some of the ones you now own. But when you cut off the single parent, the senior citizen, those on social services, those that are sick, you cut off a whole source of money. What good did it do? If it indeed, as I argue, by being out there in the economy creates jobs, which gives income tax, which enlarges the economy, you more than make it up. He that soweth shall receive a hundredfold. Where's my man from Red Deer? I needed somebody to keep me right on the Bible here. Therefore, that's what we see wrong with this government now.

There's another thing that's wrong with it, and that is the whole mental attitude, Mr. Speaker, like: "I'm all right, Jack. I'm okay. I'll look after myself. If there's anything wrong out there, it's because of all these leeches on society, dealing off the body politic." I challenge them. Ninety-nine percent of us, if we weren't born a blue-eyed white in Alberta, would be poor as church mice. We're more accidents of history than we are the making of ourselves, and maybe that's what distinguishes a Conservative from a Liberal. A Conservative thinks that somehow or another he is part of God and therefore not only blessed but he has a right to rule and, worse than that, a duty to rule.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

DR. L. TAYLOR: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Cypress-Medicine Hat, rising on a point of order.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Point of order. Standing Order 23, *Beauchesne* 484, impugning motives: suggesting that Conservatives think we are part of God, when we know we aren't.

MR. SPEAKER: That Standing Order is applied to individual members, not to a group.

The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You saved me, because I thought on the third day he'd rise again and ask you a question.

Debate Continued

MR. N. TAYLOR: To go on from that, it's the attitude that somehow or another, even though that lower strata of society had nothing to do with the billions that we've wasted in financial management, they should pay. Somehow or another it's blame the other fellow. There's no sense of responsibility.

5:00

I come to my last bit I want to make, and it's with regards to seniors. Now, I'm a senior, as you can obviously tell. Mind you, I'll match myself any day, any way, any how with them over there. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I'm a senior. Seniors, no

matter if they're the poorest church mice or the richest of society, plan for a future from 60 or 70 on that's stable. It may envisage a villa on the Amalfi coast, but it may also envisage like a lady from the town of Gibbons who just the other day died at around 98, I think it was, who had lived in a freight car on the side of the railway. She walked to the toilet that was about 20 yards away until she was 98, and God bless the town that had the reasonableness to haul off the health inspectors, to haul off the social people, and say, "Let her live that way for 20 years." That was what she wanted, that stability.

This is what we're doing when we change the seniors. It's not only today's change; it is: what will it mean tomorrow; what will we mean the day after? Really in fact most of us have made a contract as we did with our mothers and fathers and with our seniors. It's a contract. They've helped build this country. They may have fought for it. They may have worked hard at it, but somehow or another they deserve more than an economic analysis that keeps changing. Stability is the most important thing you can give your seniors, your senior part of your society. It may only mean, as I say, an outhouse a few feet away, but they want it. It's just as important for them as is the millionaire's villa. We've broken that up, because after all, if you can change it this year, you can change it next year.

There's been an implied contract since the 1940s that the seniors are untouchable. Maybe they should be. The point is that we have a whole generation of people that have saved, oriented their savings, oriented their business, worked out their whole life scheme, had the right number of children, even governed the amount of children that they had and where they lived so they could live a certain era. What we're doing is we're taking that away from them. That has to be probably the meanest thing of all. It's not even hooked to economics. What you're doing is trying to apply economics to what is a social contract.

I think Kipling said: the things that are more excellent. Or as the Bible said: not by bread alone does man live. It's been emphasized over thousands of years that there are certain things that are sacred, and to me the contract we made with seniors years ago, good or bad, Mr. Speaker, is a contract we should have to live up to.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. RENNEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to the motion and of course to support the motion. You know, it's a tough act to follow the Member for Redwater. I have to say that I really like the way the member speaks. I just don't agree with what the member says. I think he has a lot of style but not much substance to what he says. So I would like to just cover a few things that I feel need to be covered from the budget today.

I'm so pleased to be able to stand here on the government side of the House representing a government and a political party that has just brought in a budget, the second budget since we've been elected, a budget that quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we talked about during the election. We promised the electorate that we would do it, and from all points of view we are surprising the world because we are keeping our promises. We are doing what we said we would do. It certainly doesn't seem to be the Liberal thing to do, because obviously if we went through the whole election campaign – and I don't know what went on in the Edmonton area, but during the election campaign in the Medicine Hat area I have to admit that the Liberal campaign was very similar to the Conservative campaign. The thoughts were the same. The emphasis was on the elimination of deficits, elimina-

tion of debts. The electors had a very difficult time in deciding who they should support. Well, obviously, they chose the right way, because had they chosen the Liberals, we wouldn't be in the situation we're in right now. We wouldn't be halfway through a four-year plan, halfway there, on target, on goal. We would have changed our minds all the way across the board, and we would have said: well, we promised you this, but we really can't do it. On this side of the House we are following through on what we promised.

Mr. Speaker, there used to be three parties in this House. There used to be Conservatives, there used to be Liberals, and there used to be New Democrats. I'm seeing something very interesting, and I guess I didn't really fully understand what some of the differences were. The New Democrats are a party that proposes socialist thinking, and they come right out and say that they support the socialist ideals. The Liberals support the socialist ideals but deny the fact that they're actually doing it.

Let's talk a little bit about the budget, and let's see exactly what the budget will do, where we're at. First of all, let's look at what this budget has done. This budget has seen the deficit drop to 1 and a half billion dollars. When we all started in this House, we were looking at approximately a 3 and a half billion dollar deficit, so we have seen almost a \$2 billion reduction from the deficit. The thing that we have to realize is – and we all hear over and over about how damaging debt is and how crippling debt is to our society, and people say, "You really need to do something about debt." Well, Mr. Speaker, you can't do a thing, not a thing, about debt until you look after your deficit. This goes on over and over, and people will say: "Well, why are you in such a hurry? Why are you doing it so fast? It took years and years for this debt to accumulate. Why are you trying to get rid of it so fast?" Well, quite simply there is a necessity to get rid of the deficit so that we can even think about doing something about the debt.

At this point, contrary to what you would believe if you listened to the members opposite, our debt is actually rising. We are going to have more debt this year than we had last year. The reason for that is quite simple: we still haven't balanced our budget. We still have 1 and a half billion dollars to go. We will continue to attack that deficit for the next two years, and by '96-97 we will have a balanced budget in Alberta. Then we can think about the debt, and we can think about all the other things.

The other thing we've done, Mr. Speaker, with this budget is that we have introduced fundamental restructuring to the way government does business. We are not simply taking a machete to the spending and saying, "You will cut here; you will cut here; you will cut here." We have recognized that the only way that this government can get spending under control is to do so by restructuring government and doing things differently. The government that will have a balanced budget at the end of four years is not the same government that was in place at the beginning of the four-year plan, and that is very, very much intentional and very much planned. We cannot simply spend less money and do things the same way. That's what seems to have the members opposite so confused. They talk about the way government used to be, and they can't understand why we can't continue to do things that way.

Let's look, for example, at education. First of all, it must be recognized by everyone in this Legislature – it certainly is recognized by the people in Alberta – that this government places a very high priority on education. We have stated so all along. When you look at the spending estimates all the way through the provincial budget, the reductions in spending in the Department of Education are the smallest reductions throughout all of government. So obviously we do recognize the importance of education to the young people and the importance of education to

the future of our province. But we didn't simply reduce spending in education and walk away from it and leave it at that. We are going through some very, very fundamental restructuring in education. We are reducing the number of school boards in education from some 140 to 60. We are focusing the spending that we have on the classroom. We hear a lot of doomsday people out there saying that this is the ruination of education. Mr. Speaker, there couldn't be anything further from the truth. What we're doing is restructuring education. We're having a look at how education is delivered in this province, and we're saying that there is no reason in the world why education can't be as good if not better than what it has been in the past. We're going to do that by spending less money. We're going to do that by eliminating duplication, by eliminating administration and focusing the dollars from education where they belong: on the students in the classroom.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and certainly to remind members of this House that the teachers from the Medicine Hat public board took the initiative to lead the province of Alberta in coming up with an agreement to roll back wages and roll back compensation by 5 percent.

DR. OBERG: Southeastern Alberta always leads, Rob.

MR. RENNER: That's right. Thank you. That's true. Southeastern Alberta leads right across the board, not only in education, but let's focus on education right now. What the teachers in Medicine Hat are saying is that we recognize the importance of education, we recognize the importance to our children, and we also recognize that we are willing to do what we need to do to ensure that our children have the opportunity for an education that they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, I come from the private sector. I come from small business, and I come from the retail business. Small business and particularly retail business has been lean, extremely lean over the past few years. The people that I work with have not been in a sheltered environment. They have not had increases come day after day, year after year automatically. It's been a tough world out there, and it continues to be a very tough environment. What the people in my environment are saying is that it's time government recognizes the fact that the economy will not support government growing with what seemed to be uncontrollable bounds. What people are telling me is: you are doing the right thing; you are putting some handcuffs on the growth of government. That's exactly what we need to do, and we're doing this by recognizing the fact that government and government spending is not a bottomless pit.

Now, let's move on a little bit to . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair hesitates to interrupt the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, but under Standing Order 19(1)(b) the Chair must now put the question on the amendment to the consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech.

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

Moved by Mr. Friedel:

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

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned February 23]

MR. SPEAKER: All those in favour of the amendment as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:16 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abdurahman	Hanson	Sekulic
Beniuk	Henry	Soetaert
Bracko	Hewes	Taylor, N.
Bruseker	Kirkland	Van Binsbergen
Carlson	Langevin	Vasseur
Chadi	Leibovici	White
Collingwood	Massey	Wickman
Dalla-Longa	Mitchell	Yankowsky
Decore	Nicol	Zariwny
Dickson	Percy	Zwozdesky
Germain	Sapers	

Against the motion:

Black	Gordon	Mirosh
Brassard	Haley	Oberg
Burgener	Havelock	Paszkowski
Calahasen	Herard	Pham
Cardinal	Hlady	Renner
Clegg	Jacques	Severtson
Coutts	Jonson	Smith
Day	Kowalski	Sohal
Dinning	Laing	Tannas
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor, L.
Evans	Magnus	Thurber
Fischer	Mar	Trynchy
Forsyth	McClellan	West
Friedel	McFarland	Woloshyn
Fritz		

Totals: For - 32 Against - 43

[Motion on amendment lost]

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

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour, I move that we adjourn and that when we reconvene at 8 p.m., we do so as Committee of Supply to consider the estimates of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, all those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

