

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 22, 1994**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 94/03/22

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country.

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition from 434 Albertans mainly from Red Deer and area asking "the government to resist calls to remove specific books, or types of literature, from the Alberta Education curriculum."

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would beg your leave to present a petition signed by 173 Albertans primarily from southwest Calgary. The petition urges the government of Alberta not to implement the restructuring plans for education in our province.

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table a petition. There are 48 signatories from the city of Calgary to a petition asking the government to reconsider their plans to restructure the education system.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a petition signed by over 1,200 postsecondary students asking the government to keep their campaign promises and support education and advanced education.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition on the Misericordia hospital that I presented on March 9 be read and received today.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to maintain the Misericordia Hospital as a Full-Service, Active Hospital and continues to serve Edmonton and surrounding area.

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

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to have the petition that I tabled on March 7 regarding special-needs programs be read and received.

Thank you.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to halt plans for the cuts to the special needs program in our education system.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm requesting today that the petition with respect to seniors' cuts and benefits introduced on Wednesday, March 9, be read and received this afternoon.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government not to alter the level of support for all benefits for Alberta's seniors until seniors have been consulted and have agreed to any revisions.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I am giving notice that tomorrow I'll be moving that written questions do stand and retain their places on the Order Paper with the exception of written questions 174 and 180.

As well, I'm giving notice that I will be moving that motions for returns stand and retain their places on the Order Paper with the exception of 175, 176, 188, and 189.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of the annual report of Lethbridge Community College for the year ended 1992-93.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House an old friend from Lethbridge. His name is Vern Holland. More importantly, I want to introduce him today as the playing coach of the St. Albert White Sox, who will be representing Alberta in the 50-and-over Canadian slow-pitch championship at the end of July in Abbotsford, B.C. I'm told that in order to attain this august position, they had to defeat a team represented by the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. I would ask Vern to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Alvina Lake. Alvina is a social work program student at Grant MacEwan College, and she's just completing her practicum in my constituency office. She's been an excellent resource to our constituency, and we're very grateful to her. She's accompanied today by Rose Marie Tremblay, who runs the Edmonton-Gold Bar office with great skill and compassion. They're sitting in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and be acknowledged by the House.

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

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 59 visitors from the C.P. Blakely elementary school. They're accompanied by their teachers Ms Cunningham and Ms Friedrick and parents Mr. and Mrs. Young, Mr. McLeod, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Cairns, Mr. Strasser, and Mrs. Ramsay. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to present to you and through you to the members of the Legislature seven members of the St. Albert STAR literacy program. This is where they deliver English as a Second Language. They're here with their co-ordinator Tara Spenrath and volunteers Valerie Spink, Cara Gratton, Linus Feist, who give of their time and energy. The three students: Ginette Leroux, Telma Raposo, Hayam Mansour. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a second group to introduce to you and to the rest of the members of the Assembly: Benalto school, 15 people visiting the Assembly today. They're accompanied by their teacher Mrs. MacLean and parent Mrs. Progdgers. They're in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two visitors from Winnipeg: Roelie and Hans Van Binsbergen. Hans is the brother of the Member for West Yellowhead. I'd ask with your permission that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Ms Shannon Knaak. Ms Knaak is a constituent of Edmonton-Manning, and she is seated in the public gallery. I would ask Ms Knaak to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great privilege to introduce a hardworking member of this government's political party and a long-standing volunteer in the city of Calgary and quite fortunately a spouse of one of our MLAs. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mrs. Rose Herard.

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

**1:40**

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and to the members of this House from Hinton a man by the name of Robert Lyons, a good friend of mine, regional supervisor of Mental Health, and his son

Seamas in the public gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce this afternoon a very bright and capable young man from Calgary-Buffero. James Allenack I believe is sitting in the public gallery, and I'd ask him to stand and receive the typical gracious greeting from the House.

head: **Oral Question Period**  
**Kindergarten Programs**

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the Education minister admitted last Friday in Committee of Supply that he had no evidence to show that cutting kindergarten hours would not hurt a child's achievement. I guess the Premier hasn't been informed because yesterday he insisted that such evidence existed and would be produced. OECD countries are supporting preschool programs because they know they work. Only Alberta is going backwards when western countries are going forward. My question is to the minister. Mr. Minister, you say that there is no evidence; the Premier says that there is evidence. Will you tell the Premier now that there is no such evidence?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm really glad that the hon. Leader of the Opposition asked that question. I thought that perhaps he would go on to another topic today. So I'm pleased that he did. Now, with respect to the issue of early childhood services and/or kindergarten, there is a great deal of research, a large number of learned articles that have been written on the topic. In fact, if the hon. Leader of the Opposition would care to, he could go over to the University of Alberta and he would find a listing of such items in the number of about 1,200. Further, I've had my department look at the material. My office has also looked at some of the articles and research projects, and I've even read a few of them myself. The evidence is inconclusive in terms of half-day ECS versus full-day ECS, a certain number of hours versus another, the merits of early childhood services or kindergarten in terms of later achievement in school. You have many, many studies on both sides of the issue.

In terms of making a decision as a government, we made a decision to, yes, continue with an early childhood services program, but in terms of the relative priorities of the spending of government, we did reduce the funding so that a good program can still be offered for 200 hours.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the minister says, "I have asked, and the response to me is that there has been no quantifiable study done of our ECS system." My question is: how can the minister make such a huge decision that deals with the achievement of children in the education system and not even have the facts to back up his position?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader across the way and others of his caucus have been talking about research. There's been this complaint, this negative point of view, the indication that there is no research and that none has been looked at and that there is no evidence. There are reams of articles, and there are many studies that have been carried out. He uses as evidence the OECD report, and now he says that that's not relevant to what we're talking about today. I repeat: the research is there. We've reviewed it, and it's been indicated to us very clearly that there is

no consistent message as far as ECS with respect to the items that I have mentioned. On that basis and in terms of our budget considerations and the priorities that we want to place on the core program of education in this province, we made a decision.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the evidence of the OECD is very clear. This is an advantage to western countries. Why doesn't the minister recognize that? Why don't you, Mr. Premier, recognize that and give Alberta children an advantage, children who need it?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader is talking about one message, one document, and he inferred evidently yesterday in question period that there weren't any others. There are plenty of them, and we have looked at them, and we have made our judgment accordingly. [interjections]

MR. DECORE: The best way to explain it, Mr. Premier, is bungled planning.

#### Adult Education Upgrading

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the Klein government will . . . [interjections] Relax over there. Second question coming up. Mr. Speaker, the Klein government will impose huge increases in adult upgrading fees, and there will be a lack of space that will deny upgrading to thousands of low-income Albertans who are over the age of 19. This affects thousands of young people in schools like Viscount Bennett in Calgary and in Edmonton's Victoria composite, where students are attempting to achieve high school diplomas. Mr. Premier, why are you sentencing thousands of potentially productive young Albertans to go back to continued unemployment and welfare?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we're doing precisely the opposite. As a matter of fact, more money is being allocated than ever has been before for career development and skills upgrading and retraining for the job force. I will have the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development supplement.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to respond to that, because the hon. member across the way, the Leader of the Opposition indicates that the program at Viscount Bennett is gone and that all students are out in the streets. That's not correct. That's not correct. There will be \$5 million allocated from my budget that will be directed to students that are in upgrading programs in this province. Certainly the programs at Viscount Bennett will be there for high-needs students on the basis that those who have high needs will receive a grant to assist them through that. Those who have part-time jobs and employment and income may be expected to pay some tuition, which I believe is reasonable in today's world. Certainly the Alberta Vocational College will continue to take students in upgrading programs. Our intent is to provide that service to students in this province albeit differently and in different venues in some instances. It will be there for them. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question. The hon. minister may get a chance in the course of questions.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the students at Viscount Bennett have made a number of requests of the Premier to attend at

Viscount Bennett to address these issues. I'd like the Premier to tell the students exactly when he intends to make himself available to the students at Viscount Bennett.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the Liberal Party last week handed me a note advising me that the students wanted to meet with me. That note was immediately passed on to my office to make the appropriate arrangements. I'd be glad to meet with the students or their representatives, preferably their representatives because we don't . . .

MRS. HEWES: Don't like big numbers.

MR. KLEIN: Well, I mean, abuse is in my job description or shall take it, but I'm not exactly a masochist, you know.

Mr. Speaker, I would be very, very happy along with the minister to meet with both teacher and student representatives of Viscount Bennett school.

1:50

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

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to supplement because during that particular question my department was mentioned and my clients were mentioned. As part of the reforms we have over 8,500 students attending school through my department.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, we know that you're afraid to meet with little crowds and big crowds and every other kind of crowd in Alberta these days, but when the students of Viscount Bennett want to see you and you say that you're available, why would your office thwart the attempt to get the appoint made? Shortly after you and I spoke and the representative of the students union phoned, your office said: well, we don't know anything about this issue.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the note was immediately sent up to the gallery to Rod Love, and he was asked to look after it. [interjections] I'm telling the truth; right? If he would just keep his mouth shut for two minutes, I will follow it up with my office to make sure that something is set up as soon as humanly possible with the students of Viscount Bennett.

With respect to being afraid to meet with people, I am not, but I am not going to go into a situation and be called names and be yelled at. As I said, Mr. Speaker, I attended last night a meeting of some 700 people – as a matter of fact, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was there – 700 reasonable, good-thinking people, all creating the economic growth and prosperity of this province, not like the opposition screaming and shouting and fear mongering.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, it's only students and nurses and the poor who are unreasonable in Alberta. Is that what you're saying?

#### Premier's Meeting with Bishops

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, in the past religious leaders in Alberta have been reluctant to involve themselves in political issues. Recently, however, six bishops from mainstream churches in Alberta met privately with the Premier to discuss cutbacks. Now we see the extraordinary action by bishops of the Catholic church condemning the province's attack on Catholic education. Mr. Premier, confirm that six bishops who met privately with you

a month ago reported that your cuts have placed churches in Alberta in an impossible situation in terms of the pressure on those churches.

MR. KLEIN: Very interesting, Mr. Speaker. I received a phone call this morning from Bishop Paul O'Byrne, who advised me that Archbishop MacNeil is in Ottawa. This is what Bishop O'Byrne had to say. He said that the request made by the Archbishop to his congregation was done before they had received notification from the provincial government that the government required an additional 10 days to work through the problem. Bishop O'Byrne says that they want to work with the government to resolve the issue and are not trying to cause trouble in any way. They trust what we are doing and want us to trust them also.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, open up your ears and listen to the question this time. The question is clear. Six bishops met with you and reported to you of the extreme pressure that your government is putting on churches in Alberta. Tell Albertans that that is a fact, that that's what happened.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will tell Albertans that that indeed is not a fact. That is not a fact. First of all, there were not six bishops; there were four bishops. Secondly, the focus was not so much on education as it was on how the church, the Catholic church and the Lutheran church in particular, could work with the department of social services, particularly in the inner-city area, to make sure that those who are truly in need get the help they need.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, this is unprecedented when four bishops representing the church people of Alberta come to you and complain about your cuts. Doesn't that ring a bell, Mr. Premier, to tell you that what you're doing is wrong?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, where was this man? Was he outside my office door? Did you have a fly on the wall? Was Grant sitting under my desk? There were four bishops. They were not complaining. As a matter of fact, they were very supportive of the province's efforts to eliminate the deficit and to pay down the debt. They came to me asking how they could help the government, how they could work with the government to find a way around these problems. They came with reasonable thought and reasonable ideas, because these very, very wonderful gentlemen want to help.

#### **Premier's Trip to Eastern Canada**

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In the constituency of Lethbridge-West job creation is the most important issue for the vast majority of my constituents. The government has taken a number of steps to provide the environment for the private sector to create jobs. The Premier recently traveled to central Canada to speak to various groups on what we refer to as the Alberta advantage. Can the Premier advise the House as to how his message was received?

MR. KLEIN: I appreciate nothing more than a tough question. Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there has indeed been some very, very good feedback from central Canada. Indeed, one company indicated that they would be locating a fairly high-tech operation relative to aircraft communications in the city of Calgary. As I spoke to young entrepreneurs in Banff over the weekend, there were three individuals who indicated that because of the fiscal measures that we are taking, they are contemplating now moving

to the province of Alberta. So what we're doing in this province relative to eliminating our deficit and getting our debt under control and keeping a very competitive tax regime is indeed being noticed throughout the country, although it's not being noticed over there.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you. Has the Premier's visit led to any new dollars coming to our province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, it has. As a matter of fact, one of the most unusual things happened. Just yesterday I received a letter in the mail. A gentlemen wrote from Ontario. Basically, to paraphrase the letter – I don't have it here – he said that he appreciated the courage of this government, that he appreciated the resolve of this government, and that he would like to know the mechanism to make a donation not to the PC Party but to the Provincial Treasury.

#### **Alberta Research Council**

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Mr. Speaker, last week the chair of the Alberta Research Council denied that the Martin Kratz inquiry at the ARC dealt with safety or conflict of interest matters raised by the opposition. This week after having read the report, the chairman says that the inquiry dealt with conflict of interest, contravention of codes of conduct and ethics, intellectual property and contracts management, human resource practices – whatever they are – and safety and environmental issues. If the report, Mr. Speaker, had nothing to do with our inquiries, now my interest is really piqued. My first question to the chairman of the Alberta Research Council: how come the chairman didn't know what this report was all about until after he read the report?

**2:00**

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

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. I intend to try and keep the tenor of this fairly quiet, but I would say that it's difficult to comment on a report before one reads it.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The interesting question, then, will be: if the opposition inquiries didn't lead to the Kratz report, what did?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Once again, so not to inflame the House, as I've sometimes been accused of doing, the review was voluntarily initiated by the president of ARC, Brian Barge, on March 3, 1994. Voluntarily initiated.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The inquiry was obviously for no apparent reason, which I guess is just a waste of taxpayers' money.

My next question to the member responsible for the Alberta Research Council: what protection or immunity were those people who spoke to Mr. Kratz to help him with this massive undertaking given by the Research Council so they could speak freely on their concerns?

DR. L. TAYLOR: It's my understanding that about 66 persons – and I can't remember the exact number, but I believe it was 66 – were interviewed by Mr. Kratz. They were interviewed by him and him alone anonymously, and certainly there is no indication that any of these people withheld any of their comments, as will be clear when we release the report tomorrow, or were concerned about any actions taken on them by the ARC once they had talked to the investigator.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie.

### Federal Government's Credit Rating

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How others judge government actions to deal with deficits is important. Yesterday the Dominion Bond Rating Service downgraded Canada's credit rating. Could the Treasurer advise the Assembly what impact this action will have on Alberta?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct that while the Dominion Bond Rating Service maintained the credit rating for Canada's Canadian dollar long-term obligations, what they did was drop the credit rating from a triple A to a double A for a number of significant reasons. I just want to repeat two of them. They said that because of "the high amount of debt that is foreign owned . . . amounting to over \$300 billion or close to 43% of GDP" that is a concern they have, particularly because of the growing deficit problem that the Canadian government finds itself in, and especially for the second reason, that a sensitivity analysis on the deficit . . . shows that a sustained rise in interest rates will very quickly result in a significant increase in the deficit.

Mr. Speaker, this has a serious impact on Canadian provinces, because our borrowing costs are judged or set against the Canadian borrowing costs. It simply underscores the need for the Liberal government in Ottawa to get serious about a serious problem, get its financial house in order, and stop believing that we can simply slowly but surely grow our way out of this problem, which has been an unsuccessful approach to solving the problem over the last 20 years.

MS HALEY: Could the Provincial Treasurer please advise the Assembly what impact this downgrading will have on interest rates and the Canadian dollar?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly it puts significant pressure on interest rates, and it further weakens the Canadian dollar, because there are people who judge us from abroad. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud knows this very well. He's written about it extensively in his earlier writings at the University of Alberta. There has been, tragically enough, a dramatic increase in rates and a reduction in the value of the dollar since the Liberal budget brought down on February 22. The 90-day Canada treasury bills have moved from a little over 3 and three-quarter percent to almost 4 and three-quarter percent in just three or four short weeks. The Canadian dollar has dropped from 74 and three-quarter cents to about 73.2 cents, a decline of over 1.5 cents. Those international influences are there, lacking confidence in us. When those who watch us, those rating agencies and international investors, see this go-slow approach, it causes them concern and they put pressure on the dollar and higher interest rates as well.

MS HALEY: My final supplemental to the Treasurer is: could he tell us what impact this will have on Alberta's borrowing costs?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly our hope is that the markets will judge us better and will judge Canada with actions that the government has taken in the province of Alberta, a responsible approach taken to deficit reduction by the government of Saskatchewan, and hopefully other governments across the country, beginning again with British Columbia when they bring down their budget this afternoon, will show a responsible approach to reducing the deficit by cutting spending, not by raising taxes or simply hoping we're going to grow our way out of a problem.

I would repeat for the hon. member some research that was done by a rating agency in the United States, Standard and Poor's, who said that by getting its fiscal house in order, Alberta is reducing total fiscal borrowing in Canada and helping to maintain the Canadian credit rating. The Liberals in Ottawa have everything to gain and nothing to lose by Alberta's fiscal reforms.

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

### Home Care

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The majority of people who need home care are seniors. The Health business plans tell us that there are going to be more charges for these services, yet another tax. Government officials at the Red Deer meeting last week said that these user fees will be levied on a sliding scale. They said further that the thresholds were determined by calculating the amount the government wants to save and then working backwards to figure out the levels. Some rationale. My first question is to the Premier. Will the same threshold levels as the Alberta seniors' benefit – that is, starting at \$10,400 per year – be the cutoff point, Mr. Premier, above which seniors must start paying a fee for home care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will eventually defer to the hon. Minister of Health, but basically the public consultation process that is under way right now is to propose some benchmarks, to present some scenarios, and then take these scenarios out to the seniors and hear from them what is right. That's exactly what the Minister of Community Development is doing right now. I believe he is in Coronation today. Yesterday he was in Medicine Hat. He's meeting with groups of seniors throughout the province, I believe, along with the chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council. So the benchmarks are established, and we're hearing from the seniors what is right for them.

MRS. HEWES: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker, but what I'm asking is: is it going to be the same benchmark for home care as ASB? Perhaps the Premier didn't understand the question.

My supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Health. How is the minister going to determine which home care services will be charged for and which ones will remain free of a fee?

### 2:10

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I should make it very clear that any medically required home care services are not charged for in any way, nor does our business plan indicate that would ever happen. So home care services that are received by seniors and indeed in some cases others – as you know, we expanded our home care program considerably to include people under the age of 65 who might require assistance to live in their homes. However, there are charges only for services that are provided like housekeeping, perhaps some cleaning services, and so on. Those are charged to seniors, but there is no charge and there is

no charge indicated in our business plan for any services of a medical nature to assist seniors to stay in their homes.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Now, here comes the tough one.

MR. DECORE: Don't give it to the Premier. Don't give it to the Premier, though.

MRS. HEWES: It's to the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will charges for home care be consistent, the tax, the fees that you're going to put on home care, throughout Alberta? [interjections] It's a tax, Mr. Premier. Or will they vary from region to region? That is, seniors are now talking about having to get divorced to be able to access services. Are they now going to have to move as well?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, these are a fee, as anyone would pay if they were receiving housekeeping assistance in this province. What we have done with seniors is supplement that amount to ensure that no senior is in need or cannot stay in their home because of this requirement. Those fees have been in place in this province for some time. We are raising them this year, nowhere near the cost of the service, and the service will be available to seniors at those rates wherever they reside in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

#### Education Restructuring

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the continuing saga for control of education in Calgary, the Calgary board of education has sent me a letter – and I will table six copies of that – that indicates their desire to abolish locally elected school boards. They are obviously unwilling to help Calgaryans work towards changing the social concept of dependency on government. To the Minister of Education: do you believe that elected school boards should be abolished?

MR. JONSON: No. Certainly not, Mr. Speaker. School boards have an important role to play in education in this province. They have in the past, and they will continue to do so in the future.

MR. HLADY: I'm pleased to hear that, Mr. Speaker.

This comes from the belief that education is being centralized. Does the minister believe that the restructuring is centralization of education?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that when an organization or individuals or an individual are not in favour of something, they tend to give it a broad label and condemn it on that basis. I do not agree with, I do not accept this overall word of centralizing or, for that matter, decentralizing. I think that what people should be saying – if they are commenting on the directions that we're taking in education and if they are against provincial standards being set by Alberta Education, by the provincial government, they should say so. If as a school board they're against setting policies for site-based management or setting policies which relate to community and parental involvement, say that. If they're against a more open reporting method, more openness to the public, then they should say that.

In this particular case, Mr. Speaker, we are not centralizing. We are decentralizing, a flatter education system, more responsive to the public, and with more resources directed to the school level.

MR. HLADY: Good answer.

Does the minister feel that locally elected boards are and will be capable of making decisions locally?

MR. JONSON: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker. Certainly. Right now, for instance – let us take the program related to special education. In Calgary for the two school boards there there's something in excess of \$25 million in special education grants. We have a broad policy in the province called the placement of students policy, which allows a great deal of flexibility with respect to the inclusion of students in regular classes or the establishment of special classes for students with special needs who are best served that way. There is a breadth of scope there for school boards to make decisions, and we expect that they will make decisions in the best interests of the students they're serving. That will continue to be the case on into the future.

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

#### Corrections Facilities

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We understand that this government wants to privatize the most difficult kind of institution, a remand centre. A remand centre is very different from a jail. It's notoriously unstable. The population fluctuates. It is always potentially a violent place, and it requires the most experienced and well-trained staff. My question is to the Premier. Why would this government expose Albertans to the risk that goes along with turning over a remand centre to a for-profit operator?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, all of these things are proposals. They're things that are under consideration. No firm decision has been made on a remand centre or a jail. All we're trying to do is find more efficient, more effective ways of doing things. That's all we're trying to do.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DICKSON: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what we heard about ALCB privatization until it happened.

My supplementary question to the Premier is: will he promise to consult this time with local government and local police authorities before this government proceeds to privatize a remand centre?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think there's a vast difference between privatizing, as was done with ALCB – and by the way, ALCB is not working out that badly. [interjections] Well, if they would take the time to check – I can give them six liquor stores in the city of Calgary that hired back all the employees at union rate. So a lot of employment has been created, and that privatization is turning out to be a success. Yes, when you try something new – of course these people will never know what it is to try something new, because they would like to do things the same old way and spend and spend and spend more.

Mr. Speaker, I can give you this assurance: public safety will be paramount. There is a vast difference between privatizing and having private operators or components of the private sector perform various functions, and this is precisely what is being considered by the hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm content to let Albertans judge the past privatization efforts in terms of whether they've been successful.

Specifically dealing with remand centres, will this Premier assure Albertans today that in this case public safety will not be compromised in any way with privatization of a remand centre?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, of course. Absolutely.

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

## 2:20 School District Boundaries

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take a little bit of a detour from my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View in pursuing a question on education. The creation of regional boards of education poses many challenges unique to many rural parts of Alberta. Prior to the formal approval of these new regional board boundaries, will the Minister of Education inform the rest of Alberta whether or not districts or divisions within an existing school jurisdiction will have the opportunity to opt out of their present educational jurisdiction and join a neighbouring jurisdiction?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, when we developed our criteria and our overall direction in terms of the reduction of the number of school boards in the province from slightly in excess of 140 down to a target of 60, we did not, except in one or two cases in the province where this had been brought to our attention before, anticipate a large number of requests to split up an existing jurisdiction. Since the consultation process has been taking place and the many meetings have been held across the province, a number of those cases have been brought to my attention. If the school board, the area involved, the receiving school board, if there is one, or the adjoining school boards, if there are a number, come to a mutual agreement in this particular case, I believe it can be worked out, certainly in the case of amalgamation. Although in the case of regionalization we would need some additional change in legislation.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: will the partnership choices made by existing boards of education predominate over the choice of a district in choosing the new boundaries if the district or division affected can demonstrate a common geographical or a trading area that is more conducive to a different arrangement?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member has a specific example in mind, but I have to look at his proposal as hypothetical at this point. In the cases of which I am aware where this is being proposed, it is something that is mutually agreed to by the parties involved. Certainly we look first and foremost to the educational merit of any proposal. We also recognize that existing school jurisdictions do have a mandate, they do have an area to serve, and we have to respect that.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What criteria will determine or prevail in the new policy formation by these new regional boards when it runs contrary to the present policies existing in the present form in the various school districts? In

other words, if on a common theme two or three different boards of education have a difference of policy, what criteria will determine how those policies are blended into one?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, when an amalgamation or regionalization takes place, there will be a new school board which represents the areas, the wards, or electoral divisions of that particular jurisdiction. They will function as a board. They will form their policies as a new board and govern at the local level the delivery of education in that area. It is not unlike the situation that we have right now with an existing board where you have people on it with different backgrounds, experience with different policies, but it is a democratic process where they come together, vote, make a decision, and set a policy.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

## Identification Cards

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister who let confidential, personal information on staff in his department be sold to bargain hunters in a computer secondhand store is now about to lead the way in abusing the privacy of all Albertans by issuing comprehensive computer-based identity cards. These new cards will apparently collect all of the personal information that the government has on individual Albertans and put it all in one place. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: on what basis can the Assembly trust that the privacy of Albertans will be better protected than that of the employees in your department?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, there is one thing I'm going to promise the people of Alberta. They can trust in one thing: we'll get our information better on those cards than they just got their information on that question.

I am sure the individual is talking about a card that we're looking at calling for a proposal on that will take your two-piece driver's licence and put it into one with a laser picture ingrained inside the card as well as a coating that will identify who you are, when you were born, and various descriptions of you. It will be tamperproof. It will solve the problem of splitting the plastic and taking your picture out. It will help us give identification not only for ALCB but for seniors and others that need identification. The picture will truly represent yourself rather than some of the misprints I've seen on some people's driver's licences.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, did officials from your department make a presentation to the all-party panel studying access and privacy to outline the plans on how you would protect this personal information?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, there are roughly five companies in Canada that have researched and developed this. We have looked at situations in other provinces like Ontario and British Columbia. The technology is moving ahead very quickly, and the checks and balances that we can put into the equipment that will be used at some 220 registries tied back into head office through a comprehensive detailed process will indeed put in the checks and balances that are needed, that the individual is asking for.

MR. SAPERS: So nobody from your department made a presentation, so you have no plan to protect the privacy. Mr. Minister, then will you put the brakes on this scheme of yours

until after the freedom of information and privacy legislation protects the privacy of Albertans?

DR. WEST: No, Mr. Speaker. We have done a comprehensive review, and we're going forward with this. A proposal is going out the end of this week.

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

### Liquor Smuggling

MR. SOHAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent media report indicated that there's an increasing problem with smuggled liquor products coming into the province of Alberta. This concerns me greatly, and I would like to ask the minister responsible for the ALCB what measures he has taken to address this serious problem.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of interest in this issue since the development of a great deal of bootlegging in Ontario and Quebec. We have always seen a degree of it in all provinces and here in Alberta over the years. What we are going to do is work with the federal government, because actually this is a federal government jurisdiction and responsibility through the customs and excise department.

In the province here we are going to do several things. First of all, we're going to have a substantive number of inspectors. Right now we have 40 inspectors, and remember that we're 2.7 million people. Ontario, in comparison, has 45 with 10 million people, and B.C. only has 29. I'm amazed that they don't have more inspectors when indeed they have the problem they have. We are also going to set up a 1-800 number that will allow tips to be provided, and this initiative will be based on the Crime Stoppers program. We are also going to work with the RCMP and other policing agencies to combat smuggled products.

I just want to indicate that we have zero tolerance. The board recently cut the licence of a private club in Edmonton that had homemade products in their business as well as a Calgary licence that had illegally imported American products. That cancellation isn't permanent; they can appeal it. But I want to assure establishments in the province of Alberta who are taking products and pouring them into Canadian bottles that when they are caught, they are going to lose their licences on a permanent basis. This is a very, very costly thing that they're doing and fooling with.

MR. SOHAL: Mr. Speaker, are these smuggled products having an effect on provincial revenue, and because of its illegal nature and availability will it lead to increased consumption by adults or consumption by minors?

2:30

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the revenues to ALCB have stayed consistent during this last process, so we haven't seen a great change to the revenues to ALCB. Thank goodness we're a long distance from a highly populated area along the border and that our cities are a distance from Montana and other places. The effect that it has on consumption: there has been no survey that I can see where access or any of the issues around access, whether it was smuggled or whether it was legally exposed, has anything to do with increased access. In fact, one of the alarming things in Canada and the province of Alberta is that we've seen a 40 percent decrease in the consumption of some alcoholic products, the distilled products, about a 29 percent decrease in wines, and a 10 percent decrease in beer since 1982, yet we've seen an increase in population of over 400,000 people. It is a

very alarming thing to the distillers and manufacturers because consumption continues to decline in North America.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

### Special Places

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Special Places 2000, the program that will create a system of protected natural areas across the province, is one of the most positive initiatives this government has undertaken. It has involved a long consensus-building process providing ample opportunity for input from stakeholders. The Special Places 2000 report, released in early February, is an admirable document. The general public, most recreationists, and those involved in industry and forestry accept the need to conserve those areas that make Alberta a special place in which to live.

Albertans want this government to take immediate action in designating these places for protection. Part of the urgency comes from the mounting pressure for greater exploitation of our natural resources. Shortfalls in timber inventories make it increasingly difficult to designate special places in the boreal forest. Areas must be set aside before more land is allocated for timber production.

Some other examples to mention: if the remaining portions of the natural aspen parkland adjacent to the Rumsey ecological reserve are destroyed, the parkland will not be large enough to preserve the biodiversity needed to sustain the last remnant of a major ecosystem. The Whaleback area on the Eastern Slopes is another crucial area. This last untouched diverse montane area is also a strong candidate for protection under the program.

Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that the government does not seem to share the public sense of urgency in proceeding with Special Places 2000. Despite an overall acceptance by many in industry, it seems that the government's house is divided in its level of commitment to this program. The message from the public is loud and clear: the government has to stay on track, to remain committed, and to remain involved. Our natural heritage is the province's most important resource, one we should be proud to protect for future generations.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury.

### Sports Championships

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few months a number of significant sporting events have taken place here in Alberta, reminding me once again of what an exciting province we live in. There was the Canadian figure skating championships in Edmonton, the Alberta Winter Games in St. Albert, the Labatt Brier of Canadian curling championships in Red Deer, the Grey Cup in Calgary, the world biathlon championships in Hinton, and the Arctic Winter Games in Slave Lake. Each of these family events was a resounding success story that served as a great source of entertainment and pride for both the competitors and the spectators.

Alberta will continue to be in the limelight of the sporting world in the near future as my constituency will be hosting the Centennial Cup, the Canadian championships of junior A tier-two hockey, in Olds this spring. Next year the international junior hockey championships and the World Figure Skating Championship will be in Alberta as well as will the Canada Games, which



will be held in Grande Prairie, and the world wheelchair championships in Edmonton. These events provide tremendous economic benefits to the communities that host them. They account for much of the tourism revenue that Alberta is blessed with each year.

Sports are more than just fun and games. They also instill in athletes self-confidence, sportsmanship, perseverance, leadership and co-operation skills, and they promote a very healthy life-style. This component of our well-rounded Alberta life-style has been justly supported by our government through the careful allocation of provincial lottery funds. Such endeavours are part of what the lottery funds are for, because we have recognized that we need this kind of enrichment in our lives. It benefits us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Registry Services**

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the pillars of a true democratic process, of a democracy, is a parliamentary process, a parliamentary tradition that happens in Legislative Assemblies like this throughout the country. In the last session as we came to wrap up in dealing with Bill 10, the Alberta Registries Act, we saw this government stand up, adjourn the House, leaving Bill 10 on the Table but going ahead and implementing virtually everything that was contained in that Bill; in other words, taking away totally from the right of this Legislative Assembly to do what it's set out to do.

Now we have a system in place, and, yes, there are certain aspects of it that are working extremely well. I'll be the first to say that on record: people going in to get their driver's licence renewed, some of those little technical aspects where they don't have to wait the same period of time they did in the past. Nevertheless, the process is in place with many, many questions that are not answered. There has never really been a legal opinion given to this House as to whether that process that was followed was indeed correct, whether it was legal, whether it could be challenged. I submit there are possibilities of it being challenged. More important to that, it ran through certain procedures overlooking some need for fine-tuning, which this caucus was prepared to do; in other words, an appeal system, the establishment of these committees that were talked about throughout the province, committees that would be responsible for setting the appropriate charges, for setting the fees to ensure that driver examiners were sufficiently qualified to conduct the role that they were given.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that this government had the opportunity to do it properly and chose not to, and I would hope that a similar Bill will come forward so the government can correct their wrongdoing.

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

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

**Bill 207**  
**Adult Adoption Act**

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to stand in this Assembly this afternoon to initiate debate on Bill 207, the Adult Adoption Act.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has a single purpose: this Bill will create a framework that will allow the adoption of an adult person – and

I emphasize "adult person" – to take place under the jurisdiction of the courts, specifically the Court of Queen's Bench.

Adult adoptions are a very simple procedure. They are basically little more than a contractual agreement between two adults. Currently adult adoptions are granted by the Private Bills Committee, a committee of which I am the chairman. I must say that the Private Bills Committee could be doing a lot more good within the community than dealing with adult adoptions. We deal with a very, very tight time frame, we only can meet while the Legislature is in session, and we spend a good deal of time dealing with adult adoptions.

What can be passed in private Bills is somewhat vague. Private Bills according to *Beauchesne* are

legislation . . . conferring particular powers or benefits on any person or body of persons, including individuals and private corporations, in excess of or in conflict with the general law.

The private legislation should not affect public policy or amend public legislation. That's the reason that we deal with adult adoptions in Private Bills Committee, because certainly adult adoptions fall within that category. Increasingly, Mr. Speaker, Private Bills Committee is dealing with a number of other groups and individuals that bring concerns to the Legislature and ask that Private Bills Committee have an opportunity to deal with them. As I have explained earlier, Private Bills Committee only meets while the Legislature is in session, and oftentimes scheduling is a bit of a problem for the committee.

2:40

Adult adoptions do not really confer any powers on an individual or attempt to change public policy. Basically, what they are, as I stated earlier, is a contractual agreement between two individuals. I really don't feel that Private Bills Committee is an appropriate venue for adult adoptions. First, it is inaccessible for the majority of Albertans. Petitioners must travel to Edmonton to appear before the Private Bills Committee. In many cases, Mr. Speaker, this is a true hardship to Albertans. Alberta, as we all know, is geographically very large, and for what is a relatively simple procedure, these people must travel hundreds if not a thousand miles or more to come to Edmonton for a five or 15 or even if it's a half-hour hearing in front of the Private Bills Committee. It's a very onerous task. Court of Queen's Bench on the other hand is very accessible. Every major centre in Alberta has a Court of Queen's Bench, so this would be much easier for the individuals to have access to the procedure.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the Private Bills Committee tends to be a very demeaning process. Despite the good intentions of all members of the Private Bills Committee a person must come to this Legislature, sit in front of 21 strangers in a somewhat intimidating environment, and lay all of their private concerns on the line. In addition to speaking to the 21 individuals in this room, *Hansard* is in attendance recording every word that's spoken, and the sound system goes throughout the entire building. So it is, I feel, an experience that people really shouldn't have to go through for this process. The same information could easily be conferred to a judge in Court of Queen's Bench. It wouldn't even necessarily have to be in open court; it could be done in judicial chambers. It's not even necessary that this take place in open court.

I mentioned earlier that the time we have while in session to deal with private Bills is limited. It's much more accessible now that we meet on a regular basis. Since both House leaders have

agreed to change the regulations and rules regarding sittings of the Legislature, we are assured as Albertans that the Legislature will sit at least twice a year. Even at that, Mr. Speaker, that still is very limiting in the amount of time that someone has to petition the Legislature to ask for an adult adoption. Again, the court system is available throughout the year, and individuals would not have to wait until the Legislature is in session.

I look at Bill 207 as a simplification of a process. Many jurisdictions in Canada have a single adoption Act, one that covers the adoptions of both children and adults. The child adoption process is quite complex, designed to empower the state to act as a protective guardian, to protect the best interests of the child and the public. This empowerment is totally unnecessary in dealing with adult adoptions. It is not necessary for us as individuals to decide whether or not it's in the best interests of the people that are involved to let this adoption process go on. Both individuals are adults, both are responsible for their own actions, and we as a Legislature are not faced with that responsibility of ensuring that one individual or the other is not being brought into hardship as a result of the adoption process.

The court does not need to be concerned with these interests either. The court only needs to be concerned with the reason that the individuals are asking for the adoption. Those reasons are a multitude. We've certainly heard in Private Bills Committee many, many different reasons. I'll get into those a little bit later, Mr. Speaker.

The other aspect of adoptions that I would like to talk about is the cost that is involved under the present process. Presently I would estimate that the process to come to the Legislature and petition for adult adoption would run in the neighbourhood of about a thousand dollars. It is necessary for the individuals to file a fee with the Legislature, with Parliamentary Counsel, to have the Act prepared. They must advertise in the *Gazette*. They must advertise in daily or weekly publications in their own community. As I mentioned earlier, in most cases for anyone who lives outside the immediate vicinity of Edmonton, the individuals must travel to Edmonton. Those costs are not insignificant particularly due to the fact that Private Bills Committee always meets first thing in the morning, so no one can drive to Edmonton and appear in front of the committee without arriving the day before. They're faced with hotel costs, meal costs, many costs. I think the thousand-dollar figure that I quote is a very conservative figure. In many cases it might cost these individuals and families even more than that.

I'd like to deal with the specifics of Bill 207. There are a number of sections in the Bill. I'd like to identify some of the highlights in this Bill as I see them. Section 1 refers adult adoptions to Court of Queen's Bench. This is done to be consistent with the child adoption process, which is heard by Court of Queen's Bench. There is an existing process and an existing fee schedule in place, so it should not be difficult to implement this process into the court system.

In section 3 we require that an affidavit from both the petitioner and the person to be adopted be filed with the court to outline the reasons for the adoption and the relationship that exists between the two persons. Many of the cases that we deal with currently through adult adoptions are in essence blending families, families that for whatever reason were unable to have the adoption process completed while their children were minor children. We often will have a case where we have a man and a woman who marry. They each bring children into the family. Some of the children are minor children; some of the children have already reached 18. The family wants to legally bring the entire family together. In

that case, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very obvious and a very simple procedure to go through.

In section 5 we require that the petitioner be a resident of Alberta and that the adopted person be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant. This will prevent our adoption process from being used to avoid immigration rules. I think it's reasonable to expect that our Alberta courts would be acting on behalf of Alberta residents, and I don't think that we want to be in a position of possibly allowing someone to get around immigration by adopting an individual who is not already a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant. I think this is very simple.

Mr. Speaker, if I could, I would like to take a bit of a pause. I have a note here that there is an introduction to be made, if you would allow that to happen. Then I'd be happy to continue.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat has requested permission to revert to Introduction of Guests. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.  
Hon. Government House Leader.

head: **Introduction of Guests**  
(*reversion*)

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs I would like to introduce a school group from Innisfree. The students are accompanied by their teachers and leaders Nick Radujko and Leonard Grabas. I understand they're in the public gallery. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than**  
head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
head: **Second Reading**  
2:50

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Medicine Hat, to continue.

**Bill 207**  
**Adult Adoption Act**  
(*continued*)

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to get back to discussing the specifics of this Bill. Section 9 in this Bill severs the relationship between the adopted person and the previous parents. It also prevents marriage between persons who because of the adoption order would be prohibited by our laws regarding lawful marriage. Section 9 also prevents marriage between former blood relatives even though the previous parental relationship has been severed. This only makes sense. It makes logical sense. As I have to continually remind myself and members of the Assembly, we are talking indeed about adoption of adults in this particular case.

In section 10 we allow the court to overturn the adoption order within one year on appeal. The court may, however, set aside the adoption order at any time if it's found that the order was procured by fraud. Again, I think this is a very sensible piece of legislation. If for any reason the court finds that there was fraud involved, they would automatically be able to reverse the order, and I think we need to have some provision within the legislation to allow for whatever reason individuals to appeal to the court to overturn the order. So we allow a one-year period for that.

If there is one concern with this Bill – and a number of members have discussed it with me – it may be that it might be necessary to inform vital statistics of the change of parents. This is not done currently for adult adoptions procured through private Bills, but it has become somewhat an issue. Certainly I would look forward to debate on this issue as well as any other issues that members may wish to bring up. I would be willing to amend this Bill at the committee stage if it becomes necessary to notify vital statistics of such a change.

Bill 207, Mr. Speaker, is a simplification of a process. There's no need for people to come to Edmonton to have an adult adoption order made. Court of Queen's Bench meets in most major centres: Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Calgary, Edmonton, a good cross section of Alberta within reasonable, accessible mileage or kilometrage for people to travel to.

The Private Bills Committee can be involved in many other things. This morning Private Bills Committee met, as a matter of fact, and we are dealing with some new and interesting type Bills within our committee. I think that the time of Private Bills Committee, limited as it is, should be spent dealing with concerns that are of true importance to all Albertans. Adult adoptions I really don't feel fall into that category.

I really don't feel that this new process would cost any more than the private Bills process. The applicants still could use a lawyer if they wished. I don't think it would be really necessary. I think the forms that would be developed would be simple enough that someone should be able to go through the process without the consultation of a lawyer, but certainly even if someone wished to use the services of a lawyer, I don't think that we would be faced with exorbitant costs. In fact, Mr. Speaker, many of the people who now come to Private Bills Committee for adult adoptions also use a lawyer as a consultant and to assist them with the process, so there would be really no additional costs there. Again, the fee structure is already in place within Court of Queen's Bench, and the fees that would be charged would not be a whole lot different from fees that are already in place for the process we already have.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

I look forward to the rest of the debate on this Bill, and I encourage members of the Assembly to give their support to Bill 207. I look forward to further debate at committee stage, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to hearing from other members of this House regarding this Bill.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm, firstly, anxious to congratulate the Member for Medicine Hat for introducing Bill 207, and I'm delighted to be able to speak in support of it. I think this is one of those initiatives that is so fair and so demonstrably reasonable that all members should be shaking their heads and wondering why it's taken so long to see this kind of initiative come forward.

Mr. Speaker, when I first became a member of this Chamber in July of 1992, it was indeed a wondrous world, and there were many, many archaic practices and conventions that have existed, sometimes it seems, since time immemorial. This was one of those practices that I thought seemed hopelessly outdated and hopelessly stale. That's the reason I'm so delighted to see this legislative initiative here. It's one of these initiatives that I

wholeheartedly endorse and want to encourage every member on both sides of the Assembly to support.

The member who introduced this Bill did review many of the problems that currently exist with the current process. One has to ask why Albertans would have to be put to the expense, the delay in terms of time to be able to do something. We're dealing with adults here, not with children. So I think it's a very worthwhile step, legislative initiative to be able to simplify the process, to be able to make it more accessible to Albertans. For that reason certainly I support it.

As the member has said, it's quite true: the Court of Queen's Bench is there; the machinery is in place. It's really a very simple matter to simply be able to access that process. There's a boon as well to members in this Assembly and certainly to members of the Private Bills Committee who now are able to focus their energy and their time perhaps more productively on other things that do warrant scrutiny by an all-party committee.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of interesting features in Bill 207, and I point them out now because I expect they'll come up again in committee. I just wanted to draw the attention of members to them. Section 5 in Bill 207 provides that anybody who's a resident in Alberta and satisfies the legal status requirement in terms of citizenship is entitled to make the application. I just flag for the attention of members that many provincial statutes require a minimum period of residence before you can access certain processes. This one does not require any minimum period of time of Alberta residence. Now, my initial reaction was that there ought to have been a minimum period of residence. I've given it some further thought, and now I'm satisfied that there's no real purpose served by requiring a period of residence before one is eligible to apply, but I flag that for members' consideration.

The other provision in the Act which I guess always bothers me is the phrase "in lawful wedlock." I say, Mr. Speaker, that in 1994 one would hope that we can stop branding children and viewing them differently in terms of whether their parents were married at the time of birth or not. I know from speaking to the Member for Medicine Hat that he's perhaps no happier with this phraseology than I am. I think he's been persuaded by Parliamentary Counsel that there's precedent in other current subsisting statutes that's being used here. I just flag and say that I hope Parliamentary Counsel and in turn Legislative Counsel can find some creative ways so we can drop the phrase "in lawful wedlock" and ensure that legislation perhaps more accurately reflects the current reality in people's attitudes, and we can get away without stigmatizing children on that basis.

3:00

Now, there's one element in the Bill that gives me some concern. In fact, I just give members notice that I intend to seek to amend this Bill. I'm hopeful that in fact through quiet persuasion the genial Member for Medicine Hat may be prepared to sponsor the amendment. I just flag it for the attention of members now, Mr. Speaker. It has to do with section 4. Section 4 has a twofold test. The first roadblock, or hurdle, that the applicant must get over in front of the court is: we have to determine that "the reason for the adoption is acceptable to the Court." Then the second hurdle is that the reason for the adoption "is not contrary to the public interest to make the order."

My recommendation is going to be to the member who moved and introduced this Bill and to all members. We can simplify that and have a single test. A single test, in my respectful submission, Mr. Speaker, would simply be that the court may grant an adoption order unless it appears contrary to the public interest to do so. The difficulty we have with section 4(a) is that a judge has

the power to refuse an adoption order if the reason is not acceptable to the court. Well, from having some experience with the courts in this jurisdiction and courts in other places, if we allow judges to exercise a discretionary authority, we typically constrain it. We set out some tests; we set out some limits. There are no limits; there's no test. There are no guidelines to the court here, and it seems to me that you have the potential – as much confidence as I have in the members of our judiciary – to have one of the 60-odd Queen's Bench judges in Alberta simply finding some reason not to be a good enough reason and refusing it. There's no guidance in the statute to guide the justice in making that kind of determination, and it may be inconsistent with what's happening in other areas.

So it seems to me that we can achieve the purpose that I think the hon. Member for Medicine Hat wishes to achieve by simply saying that if it appears to the judge in chambers, or whatever form the petition is dealt with, that it's contrary to the public interest, the judge has the power to refuse to grant it. That would be a case where there was some suggestion of a fraud on the public purse, and there was some effort to do the adoption to be able to somehow access a program that otherwise the applicant wouldn't be eligible to apply for. In that case, well, it would be contrary to the public interest. So I'd say to all members that if you just have a contrary to the public interest test, that really is an adequate safeguard, and we get away from an invitation to members of the court to interfere and meddle in a place where, I think, we're trying to simplify and keep outside authorities out of.

In fact, there's a parallel here that I commend to the members. With the old Divorce Act in Canada what would happen is that you would get a decree nisi of divorce after you appeared in front of the judge, and then you'd have to wait three months. At the end of three months you could then apply to have your divorce made absolute. What happened was that there was power to be able to abridge that time period and eliminate the three months of waiting and get your divorce made absolute immediately, but there were two tests then that had to be shown. One was a public interest test, and the other one related to the circumstance of the individual applicant. The federal Parliament I think did the right thing and condensed those two tests into one test. So in the current Divorce Act we only have one test in this case if you want to apply to get your certificate of divorce immediately and not wait the 30 days.

I commend to the Member for Medicine Hat and to all members the same kind of reasoning. Between now and committee stage I hope that we're going to be able to do something perhaps to tighten up section 4 and remove that element of arbitrariness.

The other observation I guess I hadn't planned on making, but after listening to the comments from the Member for Medicine Hat – he said something to the effect that Queen's Bench is very accessible. I say to the member that if you live in Edmonton or you live in Calgary or Lethbridge or Medicine Hat, he's right; it's very accessible. But, Mr. Speaker, we can't forget and I'm constantly reminded by members of my caucus from outside the major centres that Queen's Bench isn't always so accessible if you happen to live in a remote corner of the province.

This is not an argument against the Bill but a real good companion to make this Bill effective in terms of making it more accessible to Albertans that want to do an adult adoption. If the rules of court were revised so that a Provincial Court judge was clothed with the power of a master in chambers – and it might not be every Provincial Court judge; maybe it's only those Provincial Court judges in the remote corners of the province where there isn't a regular Queen's Bench circuit. Instead of making people wait a month or longer or travel long distances to a major judicial

centre, we could allow Provincial Court judges to be masters in chambers and allow masters in chambers to be able to process these applications. That's even more user friendly, if you will. It becomes even more accessible to more Albertans in remote parts of the province.

So I'm going to encourage the member to take his initiative and make it even more accessible to Albertans in remote parts of the province by prevailing upon the Minister of Justice to look at doing something as I've suggested: maybe allow provincial court judges to do this, allow a master in chambers to be able to process this, because that may be even more effective, sir.

The only final remark I'd make is that as positive an initiative as this is – and I appreciate that the member has moved with alacrity to bring this forward since he first became a member of the Private Bills Committee – the other thing I'd say is that we have some major, major problems dealing with child adoption. I'm anxious to see the government and members of the government caucus move as quickly to close some of the major loopholes we've got with baby adoptions through unlicensed operators as the government caucus did to deal with this.

So I just conclude by congratulating again the Member for Medicine Hat for introducing this fine piece of legislation.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to lend my support to Bill 207 and I guess to take some credit for the fact that it is before the House because I originally had slot 207, and it only cost the member one dinner. I traded with him on the basis that to me this was one of the most compelling type of Acts that had a chance to become legislation. It's truly nonpartisan, and it's truly one that many of us have experienced frustration over, particularly in Private Bills Committee. So I certainly want to congratulate the hon. Member for Medicine Hat on this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, adult adoption need not and in my opinion should not be approved under private Bill legislation, as it's currently done. The whole process is cumbersome. It's time-consuming, and it's very subjective for such a straightforward application. The person seeking to adopt an adult must petition the Lieutenant Governor and this Legislative Assembly to bring forward the private Bill. A fee of \$200 is collected with the petition. The petitioner must also publish a notice in either the *Alberta Gazette* or in an Alberta newspaper once a week for two consecutive weeks. He must specify the object and the nature of the Bill. Once the chairman of the Private Bills Committee has informed this Assembly that the private Bill has had sufficient public notice, the Bill is sponsored by a member of this Assembly. This Assembly then grants the private legislation first reading, and the Bill is referred to the Private Bills Committee.

Before the Private Bills Committee considers the merits of the Bill, Parliamentary Counsel reports to the committee, indicating any matters that should be considered with respect to the form or the content of the Bill. The Bill is then approved by the Private Bills Committee or rejected or reported back to the Legislature where it is placed on the Order Paper for second reading.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, all of the foregoing is a ridiculous process that is quite lengthy to approve a relatively simple contractual agreement between two adults, especially when the contract has no effect on public policy or on other people. The worst part of the existing adoption process is that it must take place in Edmonton, away from most of the population of Alberta. By moving that process to the jurisdiction of the courts, be it Queen's Bench or other, we

make it more accessible to all Albertans. Courts of Queen's Bench, for example, do conduct hearings in major centres such as Grande Prairie, Peace River, Fort McMurray. This gives an opportunity, for example, to people in northern Alberta where the closest proximity right now is the city of Edmonton.

The process defined in Bill 207 will be less stressful for petitioners. A petitioner now must appear before the 21 members of the Private Bills Committee in these legislative chambers. These are 21 strangers, 21 politicians. I can't think of a person's worst nightmare coming true. Bill 207 provides for the hearing to be conducted by a Court of Queen's Bench judge, and as indicated by the member, perhaps it could even be done in the chambers. I believe that we would all agree that it is far less intimidating than appearing in these chambers.

Mr. Speaker, we must always keep one thing in mind when considering adult adoptions: it's a private contract that does not affect the public at large. There is no need to have this Assembly passing judgment, be it moral judgment by each member or by following well-established precedent, on such a personal decision between two consenting adults.

Mr. Speaker, on the surface adult adoptions do not appear to take a great deal of this Assembly's time, but during the last session there were five adult adoptions granted by this Assembly. If you assume a total of one hour for each Bill, including some of the support work, that equates to over 100 person-hours in the last session alone. One hundred hours of MLAs' time and others' that could and should have been spent on addressing and dealing with the expectations of our constituents. Those expectations do not include private Bills for adult adoptions. The time of the courts would not be jeopardized by the passage of Bill 207 in my opinion. The number of adult adoptions is relatively small, and they would be spread throughout the province. Most Queen's Bench courts would deal with only one adult adoption petition each year if any.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of Bill 207. My colleague from Medicine Hat has brought forward a solid proposal. It provides benefits to both the petitioners and to the members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take the opportunity, just a few minutes, to speak on this Bill. I believe, myself, that it's a very, very good Bill, that is going to receive widespread support of this Legislative Assembly. Other than to point out some obvious areas that I want to highlight, I think it's a given that this Bill should be and will be supported by all Members of the Legislative Assembly, at least the majority.

I am somewhat surprised, though, that Bill 207 wasn't moved as a government Bill. I would anticipate that somewhere along the line that has to occur. That should occur; it should be given the sanction of the government and be moved as a government Bill.

When we talk in terms of the Private Bills Committee and we look at the function of the Private Bills Committee, there are some Bills that do come forward that can be justified coming to that type of arena. For example, this morning in the meeting we dealt with a Bill involving Shaw cable. Yes, it needed that scrutiny by a small committee in terms of the numbers rather than coming to a larger body like this right off the bat. We have others coming up that will prove to be very interesting and should be dealt with at that level: the Gimbel clinic, for example, and the Chinese Multicultural Centre, which we deal with next week.

When it comes to adult private adoptions, that's a totally different kettle of fish. The process right now, Mr. Speaker, I believe is very, very, very demeaning. Applicants – those that are being adopted, those that wish to adopt – have to appear in front of a committee of strangers to them, and they more or less have to bare their soul. They have to let their emotions come out. There must be a loss of dignity. It must be a tremendous hardship to those people when they have to make those presentations and answer some of the questions. I even have hesitated asking questions of them for fear of making them feel more uncomfortable than they do feel. We've had instances, for example, where those affected parties have talked in terms of some real tragedies in the family, broken households and such, which really is no business of Members of this Legislative Assembly, no business of Members of the Legislative Assembly that may be part of a committee.

There are other alternatives, such as is proposed in Bill 207, and I think that that's the way it should be dealt with. I would hope that all Members of the Legislative Assembly are prepared to support Bill 207 at second reading, allow it to go into committee, and allow the Member for Calgary-Buffalo to make his minor amendments, which again I would expect would be supported by Members of the Legislative Assembly, and have that Bill proclaimed, have that Bill receive Royal Assent, and allow that system to be changed to allow adult private adoptions to be undertaken in a much more dignified manner.

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

MR. SOHAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, also, wish to support Bill 207 sponsored by my colleague for Medicine Hat. Our government has a fairly simple philosophy: we look at the way government operates, find better ways of providing the services we need to provide, and implement the better process. If that means the government does not offer a service, so be it. I see no reason why we shouldn't extend that basic philosophy to the operations of this Assembly. I believe that we should be doing everything we can to make the operations of this Assembly, including its standing committees, as simple and effective as possible.

Bill 207 is an initiative that follows that basic philosophy. Bill 207 places adult adoptions under the jurisdiction of the Court of Queen's Bench. This is consistent with the child adoption process, which also is the jurisdiction of Queen's Bench. Using the Court of Queen's Bench will make the adult adoption process more accessible for Albertans who don't live in or near Edmonton. They will now be able to have their adoption granted in the closest major centre in most cases. It is senseless to have residents of Peace River or Medicine Hat or even Calgary travel to Edmonton and appear in this Legislature just to have an adult adoption considered.

I think to try to combine the child and adult adoption process would be an error in judgment. Our courts have a moral responsibility to protect the present and future interests of any child up for adoption. In child adoption cases the courts are acting as the guardian and protector of that child.

But an adult adoption is a completely different procedure. It is an agreement between two adults formalizing an agreement that has usually been in place for many years. There is no need for the court to try to determine the best interests of the person being adopted. We should leave that judgment to the person being adopted as an adult in our society.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that the Private Bills Committee considered is if approval of an adult adoption would be against the

general public well-being. I believe that the court is more than capable of making this judgment. Bill 207 requires a written affidavit from both the petitioner and the person being adopted outlining the reasons for the adoption and the nature of the relationship between them. The court may also require personal testimony from the people involved in the application if the judge feels it is necessary. This is enough information for the court to make a decision on the matter of the adoption.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the Member for Medicine Hat has included a clause which allows the court to set aside the adoption order at any time. If the court determines that the adoption order was procured through fraud, this gives the court a check against its previous decision if additional evidence is found at a later date. A court decision may also be appealed within one year by any person who disagrees with the court's decision. I think this is a fair time line. It gives the person who disagrees with the court's decision enough time to rework their case, but it does impose some finality on the process. We have to inform the people taking advantage of this new adult adoption process that it is not something to be tried and then reversed if they don't like the results in the future. Asking the court to grant you the right to an adult adoption is a serious commitment, and we must ensure that the law we create forces both sides to consider the commitment that is being made before they apply for an adult adoption.

I do have one concern with this Bill, but it is not a concern about the content of the Bill as written. It is more of a general concern. I am concerned that in the future the fees set by the court to grant adult adoptions could become too high. I think this Bill is designed to increase accessibility to the process, not hinder it. We have to ensure that the process used by the court remains simple so that costly litigation can be avoided. It makes sense to have a lawyer draw up the affidavit and possibly even appear in court with you if it makes you more comfortable, but I don't want to see a complicated legal process created.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by saying that Bill 207 shows an initiative that is consistent with the philosophy of this government: review the position of government, find a better way of doing things, and implement that new way. Granting adult adoptions through the courts will make the process simpler and more effective for Albertans. We will reduce travel costs by regionalizing access. We will reduce the pressure on individuals by not requiring them to appear before a committee of 21 MLAs. We will increase the effectiveness of the Private Bills Committee by allowing the committee to debate other business. I would hope that we will now review the mandate of the Private Bills Committee to ensure that the committee is operating at its best. We may be able to find additional areas for the committee to consider and have them play a more active role in this Assembly.

I would like to commend the Member for Medicine Hat for bringing forward this initiative and an improvement to his committee, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to pass this proactive initiative. Thank you.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in the few moments left I want to add my support to those other speakers who have indicated their support for this important Bill, Bill 207. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

Mr. Speaker, I sat on the Private Bills Committee from 1986 until last year. In the early years in fact I don't think we had any applications of this nature. Perhaps you'll remember that too, sir.

Then all of a sudden we began to have them in quite large numbers. I'm at a loss to understand exactly why. Perhaps some of the comments that the hon. Member for Medicine Hat made would explain it: the increase in the number of remarriages with blended families where there are adult children involved, and they wish to be a part of the family in the legal sense as well as in the sense of the network of family. It could have to do as well with the reunification of families who have immigrated to Canada from other parts of the world.

It seems to me that the committee itself in dealing with these adult adoptions made some very good decisions. We did not in my term, Mr. Speaker, accept them all or recommend them all. I believe that we made very good decisions, but I have always thought that that was the wrong venue for those decisions to be made in. In most cases certainly there was a sincere objective, I felt, on the part of the applicants, but it is a lengthy and costly business requiring advertising, is time-consuming, and requires appearances here. Then it is, as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford indicated, an emotional time for the applicants.

Mr. Speaker, in the committee we seem to have no real criteria or formula on which to judge these applications, and I think that gave the potential for inconsistency in the decision-making. I feel this Bill would clear that up as well. In fact, in one or two applications there was some concern on the part of the committee that the application was being done to ease the process of immigration to this country, which may have been a good idea but perhaps using the back door to do something that couldn't be done another way.

Mr. Speaker, I also support the comments made by my colleague for Calgary-Buffalo, and I would hope that before the Bill comes to committee we can have before us some of the suggestions that I think would improve it and make it an even better Bill. I do support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to speak in favour of Bill 207. My colleague from Medicine Hat must be commended for this initiative. The Private Bills Committee, a committee that he chairs and that I am a member of, is an important standing committee of this Legislature. I believe that the time we spend on adult adoptions could be better utilized debating other issues.

Most people would look at our committee and wonder why there is a need to move adult adoptions out of the jurisdiction of the committee. Only five adult adoptions were granted last session, but as the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti mentioned, those adoptions consumed over a hundred person-hours of this Assembly's time. The most important reason to move adult adoptions out of the Private Bills Committee to Court of Queen's Bench is consistency. Court of Queen's Bench already has the authority to grant child adoptions. It makes sense to put all adoptions under the same entity. Court of Queen's Bench is more accessible for Albertans. Petitioners should not be required to travel to Edmonton just to have a contractual agreement between two adults approved. This does nothing but . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair sincerely regrets having to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to standing order 8(2)(b) we are now required to move to the next order of business.

**head: Motions Other than Government Motions**  
**3:30 Mental Health Services for Children**

507. Moved by Mrs. Hewes:  
 Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately address the shortage of mental health services for Alberta children.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to preface my comments with a quote from this important document done by the former Children's Advocate in the province. It is called *In Need of Protection*, and on page 125 the advocate says:

It appears clear that the child protection system will increasingly be required to respond to and provide care for a growing population of seriously disturbed, highly aggressive, severely traumatized, multi-problem youth, for whom intervention has simply occurred too late.

That's a pretty harsh indictment, but I believe it to be factual. I believe it to be fair in the sense that I think we have failed in this regard over a number of years.

I've been associated with mental health programs in the province of Alberta for some time, and I understand the legislation that has changed and improved and the programs that we have attempted to develop to ease this most tragic problem. Back in the '70s when Mr. Lougheed was the Premier, he did some extensive studies on mental health services in Alberta. There was a serious move to deinstitutionalize our services and our programs and to involve ourselves more comprehensively in community care, to the prevention of mental illness and to the promotion of mental health, but even in those days, Mr. Speaker, children's mental health did not have the kind of attention that it cried out for. It seems to me that it's tragic in 1994 that such a motion is even necessary, but there's clearly evidence in my mind and certainly in the Children's Advocate report that it is required.

The current environment we have, Mr. Speaker, speaks to us at length about the need for health care reform in a total sense, but children's mental health doesn't surface as a primary objective. It doesn't surface as a separate entity. Indeed, I can read from the business plan in health care on page 9. Item 3 is:

Move toward consolidation of mental health services (2 mental health hospitals, 2 care centres, 51 provincially-run clinics, plus association-provided services and group homes) to provide more preventive and community service such as: community/family/home support . . . emergency/crisis intervention . . . day treatment . . . community residential services, supported employment and vocational rehabilitation programs, and school based programs.

Now, I'm assuming that "school based programs" speak to children's mental health, but that nowhere is defined further or with any detail as to what is intended, and it emerges as simply a separate item with no explanation of what that means or the many, many other programs necessary to protect children's mental health that we have talked about for decades, at this point, in this province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what is the reality in children's mental health in Alberta? Last week we had Motion 506 on strategies in combatting family and community violence. I would remind members that this was eventually, with a standing vote, unanimously supported by this House. We have to accept the information that came to us during that debate that family violence and abuse is increasing, that we have not been successful in our efforts to achieve an end to this most frightening kind of occurrence that happens in our neighbourhoods and in our communities throughout the province that invites and breeds the potential for children to be damaged in watching violence within their own family.

Violence in schools. We've had a number of discussions in this House already about the behaviour problems that are occurring in our schools from children who are angry – angry with whatever is happening in their home, angry with their peers, angry with their teachers – and have never been able to control that anger. Simply, we have those in this House, Mr. Speaker, who want to come down hard on those children and punish them for that anger that you and I have never taught them to manage.

We have increasing unemployment in our province, now at over 11 percent. We have increasing numbers of children, over 124,000 Alberta children, living in poverty, and I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that children as well as adults are desperate in this province of Alberta. Children feel despair in poverty and in the circumstances in which they must live.

Mr. Speaker, the suicide statistics are quite frightening, terrifying in fact. According to the Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta's suicide rate per a hundred thousand for young people ages 10 to 19 is nearly double the national average. Our rate for children of those ages is 25.4 versus 13.7, the national average. That's a very frightening statistic. Almost twice as many adolescent females in Alberta commit suicide than the national average, 10.3 versus 5.4. Again almost twice as many adolescent males in Alberta commit suicide than the national average. These are from our own Chief Medical Examiner.

Children diagnosed with mental health problems. Again our own statistics according to Health and Family and Social Services joint report: 10 percent – 10 percent, Mr. Speaker – of Alberta's children, 67,000 children, suffer from some form of mental or emotional disorder. That's probably a conservative, small "c," sir, figure. The Ontario health study concluded that roughly 18 percent of Ontario's children have some form of diagnosable disorder. In mental health clinics in the year 1992-93, 4,364 was the caseload. These are terrifying statistics that we have to face, and we have to ask ourselves: in fact, are the programs that we have now dealing in any positive way with it, are we understanding the size and shape of the problem, and are we creating programs that will ameliorate it?

Adolescent drug use in the province of Alberta. Adolescents living in dysfunctional families report substantially higher rates of drug use. Three times as many young people report using marijuana and hashish than those from positive family environments. A substantial number of young people report using marijuana and hashish and amphetamines and other stimulants: 8.9 percent. Alberta adolescents are more likely to be using more substances than adolescents in other parts of Canada. Mr. Speaker, these numbers and statistics come from AADAC, a report of 1993 on illicit drug use.

AADAC reports increasing cocaine use in the problematic 16 to 17 years category. For AADAC discharged adolescents, treatment clients, the incidence of cocaine use is 67.4 percent: 76.9 for males, 56.9 for females. These cocaine users are likely to be at least one grade behind in school and are likely to be multiple-drug users.

Children with eating disorders, again evidence of mental dysfunction. The incidence of anorexia in Canadian teenagers has increased over the past 10 years. One in 100 high school girls suffers from anorexia in its serious form, five in 100 suffer from anorexia in a milder form, and the trend is growing in even 12-year-olds. These facts come from a Canadian Medical Association document. There's no real scientific research here that I know of specific to Alberta, but research on North American women indicates that 90 percent of young women have body image dissatisfaction: 3 to 5 percent are in fact bulimic and 1 to

3 percent are anorexic. Mr. Speaker, those numbers speak for themselves. They are frightening in their cumulative effect.

**3:40**

Mr. Speaker, I have been concerned as have many Albertans about the effects of the changes in supports for independence in our province, the effect this has on families and on children, and the effect this has on mental health and the causes of mental illness. Recently I think all members have had a report from the city of Edmonton expressing its concern over the impacts of this supports for independence program, and there are a number of items in here that relate to children's mental health. I'd be glad to share this document with – I should table it, sir – any members who have not seen it as yet.

Enclosure 2 has a series of cases that are really very frightening. Case 2: a single parent, two children, one child with severe emotional and mental problems, currently readmitted to three months in hospital in the Glenrose psychiatric program. As this child is only home on weekends, the parent's food budget for the child was prorated, and she was given money for food for only the two days he's home. No money was given for the money he's required to have available for him in the hospital program at the hospital. The parent has to take that out of the ordinary food budget. The child was admitted under the agreement that the parent would be at the hospital daily to work on programming with the hospital staff and child. Social assistance refuses to provide parent any money for transportation to and from the hospital. The parent lives near Southgate. Social assistance is also refusing to pay for transportation, that is bus fare, for the parent and another child to attend psychotherapy with this child's psychiatrist at the University of Alberta hospital.

The result, Mr. Speaker, is that the parent is using food money for transportation, the food bank more often, and going without food. The parent's tolerance level is such that she is discouraged about everything and unable to function at the level of parenting she needs to. The parent would like to give up on children, as she begins to feel they are the cause of her poverty and her inability to get out of poverty.

Mr. Speaker, there are pages of those cases, frightening in every aspect, speaking to the extended result that happens when we do things like the cuts to SFI, require those good workers in supports for independence to cease programs, to cut off people and not only don't support them in trying to help children who are emotionally disabled and emotionally ill but in fact make it far more difficult for them. I hope the minister will take a look at that and at that report.

We have very limited resources. The misconceptions and the lack of understanding of mental illness have had even more negative effects on the treatment of children. There is a reluctance, I believe, to recognize that children are suffering from mental illness, and that's been a major barrier in the development of services. The few services that do exist can't meet the growing demand. Counseling programs have long, long waiting lists, and many of them offered by private agencies have had to be drastically cut back because of the absence of funding. Crisis units, where available, are limited. Within the continued pressure on large acute care hospitals, Mr. Speaker, there are fewer psychiatric beds and fewer and fewer places to turn when there is an emergency. Native representation and other cultural minorities desperately require services that are culturally sensitive. There's inadequate training in children's mental health for teachers. Increasingly, as we have integrated students with behaviour problems in the schools, teachers find themselves struggling to help parents of children who are not a problem understand why a

disproportionate amount of their time must go to dealing with the behaviour problems in their classrooms. All of these things lessen the chance for early detection of a child's mental illness. Staff shortages, especially child psychologists and psychiatrists, contribute to burnout among existing professionals.

Mr. Speaker, another factor in the current environment is the lack of co-ordination: service delivery is inconsistent, gaps in service for departments. We all know the departments that each play a part in this field of practice: Education, Health, Family and Social Services, and Justice. There is isolation among community agencies, and it results in a duplication of resources, assessment, and referral. Among the services that are available, they are too age specific in my view, meaning that what's available for a preschooler is nonexistent for a teen. The lack of early intervention, identification, and prevention means problems escalate, requiring more costly and lengthy care in the future. Access is restricted to those children who have formal status with one of those four department I mentioned. In Family and Social Services, for example, the child has to become a ward of the province in order to get treatment. The lack of co-ordination and inconsistent programming leaves families and leaves professionals themselves with little information as to what services are available and how they can be accessed. Lack of a 24-hour emergency service is obvious.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lengthy list of things that need to be done. Have I got time?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MRS. HEWES: Three minutes. Thank you. I'll start into it. Ah, someone said no. Well, perhaps I'm boring the backbench, but I would invite them to take a good hard look at it, because I think it's an important subject.

Mr. Speaker, what is needed? Well, the motion simply urges that the government take some steps immediately. We need a mandate for children's mental health with clear lines of authority, responsibilities for co-ordination and research. We need the establishment of a children's health mandate with a special section specific to native children. We need to expand the Children's Advocate office to include all children in receiving services from the government and responsibility for mental health services as well, I believe. I think the services should be provided according to need, not according to which department mandate the child falls under; that is, a young offender can get treatment from the Department of Justice. Children and their families need a single point of entry and referral as well as 24-hour emergency treatment. We need a catalogue of the available services and programs for children's mental health. We need increased resources and funding to existing counseling programs. We need to offer respite care for the families caring for a child with a mental illness. We need more co-ordination and collaboration among the service providers. We need support programs of early intervention to identify the problems and improve training of professionals, teachers. We need to encourage our present educational systems, social work schools, faculties of psychology and nursing, to develop culturally sensitive programs that would be available to native people and others. We need to establish a team responsible for the development, implementation, and evaluation of a native children's mental health service. The team should emphasize traditional native process and input from elders.

Mr. Speaker, I'm hopeful that all members will support this motion. I should express my disappointment that the House did not support the motion on the rights of children, but the United Nations convention on the rights of the child – the declaration



states that every child has the right to special education, treatment, and care in the case of any physically, mentally, or socially handicapping condition.

Mr. Speaker, health is also a social issue. It's not simply determined by a person's genes or by the food one eats or contact with disease. Health depends to a much larger degree on where we live or how we are treated by others, on whether we have the means to seek help when it's needed. Mental health is the product of the society that we live in, that we create.

As legislators, Mr. Speaker, every one of us has a responsibility to be advocates for mental health. I invite all members to support this motion.

**3:50**

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

**DR. L. TAYLOR:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to participate in this debate on the availability of mental health services for children in this province. Mental illness is a devastating affliction for anybody but even more so for children. It is the Department of Health that is most involved in providing mental health services in this province. The department is constantly reviewing the programs it provides, always looking to improve their availability and efficiency. In fact, we're going through this whole restructuring in health care to increase and improve availability and efficiency.

This year the three-year business plan of Alberta Health outlines the strategies that will guide the restructuring of the health system that is about to take place. The strategy for mental health services for the next three years involves a move towards the consolidation of mental health services. Services will be provided by two mental health hospitals, two care centres, and 51, Mr. Speaker – 51 – provincially run clinics . . .

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How many?

**DR. L. TAYLOR:** Fifty-one, as well as an association providing services and group homes. So there will be plenty and a wide range of services across the province.

The goal of this strategy is to provide more preventative and community-based services, such as support services in the home and community, emergency or crisis intervention services, day treatment programs, community residential services, supported employment, vocational rehabilitation programs, and as well, school-based programs. The focus of these services will be on the community, where it should be, as the mental health hospitals downsize and the resources shift to the community. Educational, training, and consultative services will be more readily available within each community. Once again, that's where the services should be available. As the system is restructured, we will encourage individual families and communities to identify their own mental health needs, and these may vary between communities, because they will be identified at the various communities.

In terms of the special needs of children with mental health problems, the focus will be on providing support for those involved in providing for the needs of children, such as parents, teachers, youth leaders, and child care workers. We are also witnessing a shift in focus from the treatment to prevention, and that's a very important shift we're going to have through the whole health care system. Treatment will, of course, always be a part of the delivery of mental health services. The mental health problems of children can be attributed to everything from family conflict to biogenetic influences. For those problems that are preventable, we will benefit ourselves a lot more by concen-

trating our efforts and our resources on promoting the concept of mental health, not mental illness. We must develop and implement strategies of prevention and where possible pursue a pathway for early intervention. That, Mr. Speaker, is one of the most important things that we must do on a community-based level: provide early interventions where possible.

In a study of the mental health needs of children in the care of child welfare Dr. A.H. Thompson concluded that it is unlikely that any care system will have the resources to provide a traditional professional treatment service to all who require it. Simply not possible anymore. Because of this he advocated the importance of focusing on approaches to mental health services other than that of treatment. He's advocating prevention, and that's where we must be, Mr. Speaker, in the area of prevention. It has been found that children under the care of child welfare are unfortunately at a higher risk for mental health problems. By identifying members or potential members of this high-risk group at an earlier stage, perhaps it would be possible to provide help prior to the development of mental, emotional, or behavioral problems. Once again prevention. This would, of course, benefit the child and cause the treatment to be less costly and less involved.

Child abuse has also been identified as contributing to mental and emotional problems. By working to prevent child abuse, we are preventing a significant amount of childhood emotional problems at the same time. This also reduces the occurrences of delinquent behaviour, which in turn eases the demands on the court system.

There are many possible ways of addressing the availability and delivery of mental health services to children. We have chosen to take a proactive approach, one that will benefit both the children and the taxpayers in the long run. In considering the mental health services available to children, we must also look at what we hope to achieve by providing these services. We must identify what our expectations and objectives are. It seems that the ultimate objective is to enable people to assume personal responsibility – and this is very important – for their own state of psychological and emotional well-being. The question is: how is this to be achieved? We must insist on personal responsibility.

The children's mental health project has established a list of standards that act as a measure of mental health and serve as a guideline for the delivery of children's mental health services in any community. According to these standards, every young person should, number one, assume personal responsibility for personal actions. I must say that's something that is lacking in our society. Two, be able to modify his or her own behaviour to meet changing circumstances and conditions. Three, understand and respect the wishes and needs of others. Sometimes I think this is lacking as well. Four, learn and appreciate societal rules and cultural values. Five, be able to communicate his or her needs to others. And six, be able to pursue his or her own potential and the sense of personal destiny. These are the basic goals, Mr. Speaker, essential for any person to be a productive and contributing member of society, and we must reinforce these goals with young people.

In order to promote and encourage children to achieve these standards of mental health, it is up to the health community and the community in general to live up to certain standards as well. Children should have caregivers that understand their unique emotional and psychological needs. They should be protected from individuals and circumstances damaging to their psychological or emotional well-being. They should have support and assistance from caring and knowledgeable adults at times of psychological or emotional distress, and as well they should have social and emotional support in the exploration and development of their own self-image. These standards are broad, but they do

offer a guideline along which mental health services for children can be provided. By involving families, schools, and communities in providing for these conditions, we will be strengthening the entire system of children's mental health services.

The issue of improving mental health services involves a lot more than throwing more money at a problem to provide more treatment services. This government is concerned with the mental health of our children, but we are looking at alternatives to old methods. It's time to try something new. Status quo in all areas is no longer acceptable. We as a society cannot survive on status quo. We are increasing the ability of communities to tailor mental health programs to their particular needs. We are also focusing on the aspect of prevention to keep children from having to suffer because of mental or emotional problems and to maximize our own resources so they can be used where they are needed most.

The issue of mental health services for children is a serious concern but one that we are well aware of and have well in hand. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the chance to discuss this matter, and I thank the member opposite for her concern.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering whether or not the last speaker was actually for or against the motion. I'm assuming that he'll be supporting the motion because of the passion with which he spoke about the need for an emphasis on providing new and innovative approaches to promoting mental health and combatting mental illness in children. So I'll be looking forward to the member's vote.

4:00

The children that suffer from mental illness are children that live with loneliness. They often live in isolation, often with depression and hopelessness. It is all too often that we wait until this hopelessness and depression manifests into crime or into violence. We often wait for that before we do anything. I certainly agree with the last speaker that we really have to focus more on prevention, and if we don't, Mr. Speaker, our lack of action will usually mean that we'll be mourning over our own inaction, because we'll be dealing with the suicide or the sudden death of a young person by other means. This can't be allowed to happen. We have an obligation to our children, and this obligation has been sadly ignored for far too long.

When the Children's Advocate examined mental health services for children in his report on services for children, this is what he had to say:

The lack of political resolve, decisiveness or management effectiveness in this area are devastating for children and families who are affected by mental, emotional, behavioural disorders, substance abuse, suicide and other mental health problems.

This Children's Advocate found nearly universal agreement that Alberta suffers from a critical shortage of mental health services for youth.

Mr. Speaker, it wasn't just the Children's Advocate. This wasn't news to the Legislature of this province. In June of 1992 the provincial review conducted by Alberta Family and Social Services into services for 16 and 17 year olds concluded that there is no comprehensive children's mental health program in this province, concluded that this issue is not one that requires more study but requires immediate action. That action, sadly, still hasn't happened.

Mr. Speaker, not only that review but even an earlier review, when Alberta Family and Social Services did a program review of FCSS in 1991, concluded, and I quote:

The review panel heard that in some communities Community Mental Health Services, offered through Alberta Health, were not available at all, or that [those] services had been greatly reduced.

Now, that was 1991. The situation certainly hasn't improved at all since that date.

Now, in particular reference to children who require mental health services and mental health interventions who come into conflict with the law, I can tell you that there is a particular sense of desperation. In the Edmonton Young Offender Centre, which is one of two secure-custody centres for young offenders in this province, where often over 200 young people are housed at once, there are only two psychologists available for those 200 youths at any one time and then, of course, a psychiatric team on an as needed basis. As budget pressures force fewer and fewer programs to be delivered, we see that often for children who require a psychologist's service while they are in one of those two secure centres, like the Edmonton Young Offender Centre, their time available to meet with a psychologist is often measured in minutes, just in mere minutes. These are children who have been sent to secure custody often because they don't have the coping skills to survive safely and crime free in society. We are setting these children up for continued failure, and we are setting our communities up, Mr. Speaker, for continued crime.

When it comes to some of the specialized programs, we do in fact have a very successful children's mental health program at Alberta Hospital, the Turning Points program. This program has 18 beds. It can only deal with 18 of these severely emotionally handicapped young people at a time. That's woefully inadequate. It's true that there are some outpatient programs. There is one major outpatient program in Calgary and one in Edmonton, again with the capacity for only the most limited of caseloads. In Edmonton they struggle to maintain a caseload of 80, and that's estimated to be perhaps one-quarter of the cases that have been brought to their attention. They can't handle the other three-quarters, Mr. Speaker.

We need all kinds of increased emphasis on follow-up and treatment in the community. The lack, the paucity, of programs is legion. Families all over this province are frustrated to the point where they either give up on their children and turn them over to the custody of the province or in fact they even leave. Mr. Speaker, I'm dealing with a constituent at this point who is literally shopping the world for psychiatric treatment for one of their adolescent children because there is nothing available in this province. This would be a shame, to see this family torn apart and their particular plight worsened because of an insensitivity on the part of the government to provide for a very evident community need.

There are children throughout the province who are told that they don't have a problem. They don't have a problem, that is, until they become an adult or until they break the law. We all too often turn our backs on these children in crisis, and we say, "Well, they obviously can't be mentally ill because they're only kids." Well, Mr. Speaker, we know better than that now. We know that these children do in fact manifest mental illness at an early age, and it's incumbent upon us to do something about it.

I would suggest that there are a number of areas where the province could be far more proactive than it is now. In keeping with the strategic mental health plan that the Minister of Health tells us one day she'll make public, in keeping with the work of the Canadian Mental Health Association, which has been talking about community-based early intervention for decades, in keeping with the Alberta Medical Association, which has come out and called for more early intervention for children, I would suggest that the government could do a number of things. They could, in

fact, start providing outpatient clinics in rural Alberta. There are absolutely none available at this date. They could increase support for community-based crisis intervention teams throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, families of children, particularly adolescent children, suffering from a diagnosed mental illness such as schizophrenia desperately need the assistance of this province. They need respite care. They need counseling. They need support, which is so sadly lacking. We need emergency counseling for young victims of violent crime. We need to put more emphasis on dealing with children as they go from childhood through adolescence into adulthood and have to cope with this increasingly complex world. If we don't, the legacy of increased mental illness, increased violence, increased suicide is what we will inherit instead.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important that this Legislature recognize its responsibility in providing leadership, in providing services for these children and these families in crisis, and I would urge all members of the Assembly to vote for this motion.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a bit of pleasure to offer my thoughts on Motion 507. I know the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a great deal of heart when she speaks about this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I just wonder how many members here in this Assembly have ever had the opportunity to be on a maximum security ward in a psychiatric hospital. I know that anyone who has taken that brave step knows that it's a very intimidating place. Mental illness is a subject that people often shy away from. No one wants to talk about it. People are not comfortable with it, and to some it causes embarrassment to families. To others it seems to be a subject that they would rather leave alone. Because of this, I think it's particularly important that we discuss this issue in the House today.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

There may be problems with the delivery and availability of mental health services for children. However, mental illness, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has already indicated, knows no gender, knows no age or religion, income level, or any other socioeconomic background. There have been increased demands put on some of the hospital facilities. These have placed limitations on psychiatric floors so that the geriatric patients in some are on the same wards as teenagers, and to a young child, a teenager, this has caused some friction because the same child resents being treated alongside an elderly geriatric patient, whom they feel they have nothing in common with, with the treatment they're being provided with.

#### 4:10

Another problem that affects the effectiveness of the system is that some people will use psychiatric wards as a means for free lodging, a shelter, or purely escape. Is it fair in the minds of many to blame the government for this following situation which I portray to you? Although I don't believe it's necessary to go into the details of names, it's a scene that happens quite frequently on psychiatric units. It's 2 o'clock in the morning. It's a clear night, and there's a full moon. A young man shows up at the emergency ward of a hospital that has a psychiatric unit. He's distraught. He's under the influence of something. He claims his medication has run out and that he has no money. He claims he wants to kill himself or, in some instances, he wants to kill

somebody else, but he's had a fight with his family that day, and he spent the rest of the evening in the bar. The nurse on call in the emergency unit calls the doctor. The doctor, a general practitioner, because of the past history of incidences, refers the young man to the psychiatric unit. Within an hour he's checked onto the ward, a ward that costs \$600 per patient bed day, on a voluntary admission. Now, Mr. Speaker, when these funds that we talk about today run low, I have to wonder out loud if some of the people using the facilities have taken advantage of the services that we're providing.

Another problem that affects some of these people is that many of the people will require the psychiatric services of the hospitals and the people who provide the services in them, but they turn around and want to abuse the system. In fact, in the very instance that I just cited, three days later the young gentleman, when he received his welfare cheque, suddenly felt better and checked himself out of the hospital. Now, the point of bringing that up, Mr. Speaker, is that many of the young individuals who could have used that bed for legitimate needs were deprived of a very expensive hospital bed by somebody who was using the system. This is a very difficult problem to identify or to address, and I know that it takes some research, but I know that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would probably agree with me that if we could even look at the instances of abuse within the system, we could at least try to offer the services to those young people who truly need it.

I'm not convinced that the problems I've identified indicate a shortage of services; rather, I believe we have to reconsider how we go about providing these services. We've got many young people who through their own actions have provided a very real and positive role model for others to follow, and I encourage families and friends and society in general to be supportive of these kids who need the services that mental health and illness have put on them. There are many young people out there today who are speaking out against drugs. I believe that if young people can look up to somebody they can relate to, one of their own peer group, they suddenly realize that there's more to life than a night or night after night on the town abusing alcohol, abusing drugs, and consequently entering into a long period of depression. After a substantial period of time in abusing some of these drug and alcohol situations, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that the kids in today's society have a role to play in pulling up the self-esteem of those who are less fortunate.

Mr. Speaker, if we are going to work on re-evaluating how mental health services for children are provided in this province, I think there are many useful projects that we can look forward to that focus on the co-ordination of services between the departments, as well as involving Health, Family and Social Services, Education, and Justice in ways and means of improving and eliminating some duplication that goes on in providing the services so necessary for our young people. There's no simple solution to improving this delivery or accessibility of mental health services to the kids, but I do believe there's one thing I am firmly convinced of, and that is that no amounts of administration and no amounts of bureaucracy can replace the numbers of people who play the lead role on the wards, in the offices providing the services for the kids so desperately in need of mental health services and the programs that we offer.

I guess what I've said, Mr. Speaker, is that we can look at ways of changing how we deliver the system, but I think it's imperative on the boards and on the groups involved that before any substantial reductions are made in the dollars, they look at their own administration, they look at the bureaucracy that they've created, which is taking away from the dollars that will actually

go to benefit the children who are in need of this mental health program or service.

With those few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I would step aside so someone else can rise.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. Edmonton-Centre.

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few very brief comments, because I know there are many other members who want to enter into debate. Motion 507 says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately address the shortage of mental health services for Alberta children.

Let's talk about what mental health services are. Mental health services are those that when a child is in desperate need of psychiatric or psychological services, there is help there for the child. It is not defined by the number of hospitals we have or the number of administrators we have or the number of beds we have. So to address the shortage of mental health services addresses the fact that there are children in our province who are in desperate need of mental health services who are not getting the services that they require. It is not an immediate call to spend more money on these services, although that may be appropriate. It is a call to ensure that the children who need mental health services in our province receive those services. I'm concerned by some of the comments made by previous speakers that this is a nice idea, but we don't need to spend any more money and therefore it's not supportable. This is calling for making sure children get those services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the comments made by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the Member for Little Bow I appreciate. I do recognize, speaking specifically to the Member for Little Bow, that there are times in the system where perhaps services are used that are not needed to be used in a particular way; in his words, abuse of the system. I would challenge him to think about a 12-year-old native boy from Grouard who is suicidal, who needs protective care or custodial care, and how that child is abusing the system or perhaps the 14-year-old anorexics who are admitted to hospital because they are desperately ill, physically ill because of their anorexia, and then transferred to a psychiatric unit and how that is an abuse of the system. We need to be really, really clear, as a footnote here, that you cannot simply walk into a psychiatric ward and say: "Book me a bed, please. Here's my Visa or here's my health care card." You must be admitted by a physician. Perhaps we do need to curb. If there is misuse or inappropriate use of facilities, of services, then we need to place more responsibilities and maybe some more resources at the physician level or the entry level to make sure that these kinds of things don't happen.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are many things that we can do in terms of prevention, and the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat alluded to some of those. But, sir, I must point out, drawing on my background as regional director of Canadian Mental Health and many, many years involved in mental health at the service delivery level, that the reality is that many people in this province, many organizations in this province have been pushing long and hard for preventive strategies. The way to ensure that we have preventive community care and community intervention at the early level is to have a very concrete plan, not simply to close hospital beds and expect the community to pick up those resources, which I'm afraid is happening in the actions of the current government and its hospitals. We need to recognize that any credible authority has said that if you want to move to a preventive mode, you have to be willing to spend more dollars or

more resources in the short term, because you simply can't expect prevention to take over, by definition, immediately from treatment. Prevention will take some time to phase in, some time to have some impact, sometimes even intergenerational.

4:20

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to challenge all Members of the Legislature to support the motion. It calls for more services to be provided for children with mental health requirements. It does not automatically, as has been suggested and as I've mentioned, call for more money or more resources, although that may be appropriate in some circumstances. For members who think they may want to vote against this motion, I would like to challenge you to stand in your place and to be able to take responsibility for the times when we can't get children the adequate care.

Since being elected, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've ran into situations where children who have been sexually abused over a long period of time only have access to six hours of treatment after that. Yes, we need to do prevention. Yes, we need to ensure that potential perpetrators know that we as a society are going to deal very harshly with them when they are caught. But when we have young children who have been sexually abused for years and who are given by the Department of Family and Social Services only six hours for treatment, I think that is a crime. We need to think about the fact that we need more services for those children.

In addition, when we have a situation where young children are sexually abused by a father, are being put back in that situation in spite of a government order and the department has to move in to apprehend those children, there's no treatment facility for those children; there's no custodial facility for those children. The only place for those children is a hotel room. The ministry then refuses to pay for a hotel room, so the children are put into a home for battered women or a refuge for battered women, a shelter with no treatment and no follow-up. I think we do a grave disservice to those children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must be providing treatment programs for children of abuse. Certainly, speaking to some of the comments from the Member for Little Bow, there are situations where the mental illness or mental problem that the young person is having is essentially reactive in nature, maybe reacting to a divorce situation, an overuse of drugs, a variety of other kinds of situations, but we must also recognize that there are some biological and genetical determinants of mental health. We must recognize that those are beyond the control of the child.

I would challenge every member to sit down and talk with a 14-year-old who is suffering from schizophrenia and have them try to explain to you the pure hell that they live every day. I wish I had the words to explain it. I'm not sure I fully comprehend it. The nearest words that have made any sense to me in terms of descriptors of this experience are "pure hell." We have an obligation to ensure that that child, that young person has the kind of support, intervention, and treatment that they require and prevention to ensure that that illness does not drag that person down further and further.

The facts are very, very clear in our province. Regardless of who is to blame, regardless of how it happened, the facts are that not all children who require mental health services are getting the services that they need. You either pay me now or you pay me later, whether that be dollars, resources, attention, redirecting services. However we're going to do it, we have to make sure that those children have what they need today.

I'll leave it at that, because there are other members who want to speak. I strongly, strongly encourage all members to support this motion.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-McCall. Just to remind you, two minutes.

MR. SOHAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has brought this motion forward so that we may have the opportunity to discuss the mental health services that are available to children in this province. I am pleased to be able to rise today to do just that. This government is committed to providing proper mental health services to the children of this province. I would like to illustrate this commitment by discussing the variety of services that are available.

Mental health services in Alberta are delivered through government departments, hospitals, community agencies, and private practitioners. On the government side the major responsibility for funding and delivery rests with Alberta Health, although there are other departments involved in providing services related to mental health and well-being. Programs provided by Alberta Health include those of 54 permanent and 40 traveling community mental health clinics around the province. These clinics provide community-based assessment, diagnostic, and treatment services to both rural and urban Albertans. The provincial health units are also involved in providing mental health services through the home care and community health nursing programs of these health units. Preventive, referral, treatment, rehabilitative, and support services are provided to clients with mental health needs.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on this motion under consideration.

All those in favour of the motion by Edmonton-Gold Bar, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Against the motion:

Ady	Friedel	Mar
Amery	Fritz	McClellan
Black	Haley	Oberg
Brassard	Herard	Paszkowski
Calahasen	Hierath	Renner
Cardinal	Hlady	Severtson
Coutts	Jacques	Smith
Day	Jonson	Sohal

Dinning	Kowalski	Stelmach
Doerksen	Laing	Thurber
Dunford	Lund	Trynchy
Fischer	Magnus	Woloshyn
Forsyth		

Totals: For – 27 Against – 37

[Motion lost]

[On motion, the Assembly resolved itself into Committee of the Whole]

**head: Government Bills and Orders**  
**head: Committee of the Whole**

**4:40**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 6**  
**Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper adjourned debate and wishes to continue.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's always just great to be able to close or adjourn debate or leave the debate and return to it the following day, because I really had an awful lot to talk about in Bill 6 and the concerns that I had in Bill 6 with regard to the underground storage facilities that are being contemplated being pumped with natural gas and natural gas liquids that could be stored underground.

I want the hon. member who introduced the Bill to perhaps respond to some of my concerns. On the underground storage facilities, Mr. Chairman, my concern is this: do we have any facilities now, and have we identified any of these underground storage facilities? Are they to be built, or are we using existing wells that we can just pump or inject the natural gas and natural gas liquid into?

The Crown in the past was required to negotiate individual agreements with each storage operation with respect to the use of storage spaces. I'm wondering if this is a practice that worked well. If it did, are we going to continue this practice in negotiating individual agreements, or is it open season? Can we just find anywhere and just get some kind of an agreement or a licence and just go ahead and pump what we want down these underground storage facilities?

I'm wondering if we're not losing control somehow when we start talking about opening up and allowing for these storage facilities to be utilized all over the province. I know that it wouldn't be very difficult if somebody hit a dry hole somewhere to be able to, on the sneak, perhaps go over and utilize that dry hole by pumping these products in there without the control or without the knowledge of the government. I really think there have to be some real tight controls here.

My other concerns lie inasmuch as the demand, Mr. Chairman. How much demand is there for such a storage facility? How many are required in this province? This has not been addressed. I think and I would hope that the hon. member who brought this Bill forward has some kind of indication as to how much demand there really is in the province of Alberta that encouraged him to bring this Bill to the forefront. Is this going to be a commercial venture? Is it going to be something that different companies in the province could bid on, similar to, say, garbage dumps that are

out there, where we can buy a piece of property and then somebody could sell the use of that garbage facility? Is this going to be the same thing? Is it going to be something like a dumping ground, where a corporation could own one of these underground storage facilities and just allow, for profit, anybody to come in with some natural gas or natural gas liquids that have to be disposed of?

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

I'm not only talking about storage here. We're talking about disposal, because that's what I think this is all about. I think that it's far more than storage. This is a disposal. This is nothing more than a garbage dump. If we're going to be creating garbage dumps all over the place underground, mind you, in perhaps old wells, perhaps we could use these orphaned wells that we keep talking about. Who knows what is in mind here? These are some of the things that I have to understand before I could agree to something like this.

I also have a major concern with regard to groundwater. Groundwater has always been a very important asset, Mr. Chairman, that we have to preserve, and we have to ensure that the groundwater is not being affected adversely here. I recall years ago in the Fort McMurray area opening up the tap and smelling the water. I mean, just smelling the water alone was enough to make you gag years ago. Around the Redwater area – and I know the hon. Member for Redwater will attest to this – the groundwater was just absolutely horrible. You could stop at those coffee shops along the way on Highway 28, and I tell you, you couldn't have a cup of coffee, let alone ask for a glass of water, because it was just horrendous, the smell and the taste of it. I think it had a lot to do with, of course, the oil wells and the gas wells that were drilled in the area and the fact that all of this development that took place in drilling, et cetera, perhaps got into the aquifers and caused the groundwater to have this bad taste and bad smell to it.

So that has to be addressed, and it really ought to be addressed now before we can go much further with Bill 6. I think we have to look at what it would do to groundwater itself. Not only will it discolour it, perhaps, or maybe make it taste bad, but to go a step further, what is it going to do in terms of the supply of groundwater? Will it displace this water? Will wells ultimately fill up with the natural gas liquids that are going to be injected down these holes into these underground storage facilities?

I've got a tremendous amount of questions, Mr. Chairman, that need to be answered here, and I look forward to hearing more from my hon. colleagues. Perhaps an introduction of an amendment might be in order here with respect to the groundwater that I'm so concerned about.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to allow my colleagues to continue.

Thank you very much.

MR. ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

4:50

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A number of observations I wanted to make with respect to Bill 6.

The first thing I wanted to note, Mr. Chairman, is that the hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod in introducing Bill 6 for second reading on March 21, at page 746 in *Hansard*, made the observation – and I won't quote it – that in terms of working co-operatively with industry, in fact Bill 6 represents a marvelous

product resulting from close co-operation between industry and government. Well, that concerns me, because you recall that when we were dealing with Bill 3, also at that time it was represented by representatives of the government that that also represented close liaison with industry.

I want to say that you may recall that on that particular Bill, Bill 3, I had moved an amendment to reduce the limitation period for a prosecution. At that time I recall the minister responsible for energy in this province telling me and telling other members and some of her colleagues that this is no problem, that this is what the industry wants and this is something that we've worked out with them. Well, I want to tell you that I've received a half dozen phone calls from oil companies, resource companies based in downtown Calgary that have been most interested in the excerpt from *Hansard* dealing with Bill 3. What we find is that that marvelous partnership touted by the government and promoted so forcefully by the Minister of Energy in fact starts to fall away and starts to crumble. It dissolves, because what we find is that – many people in the industry have told me in the last week that they're upset that the government would extend the limitation period to 36 months. I've been told by people in the industry: "This is certainly nothing we asked for. We don't want a longer limitation period for the commencement of a prosecution."

So, Mr. Chairman, why do I relate this story? What do we make of this? I relate this story with respect to Bill 3 and my experience with it because now when the government comes forward with Bill 6 and once again the government representative, in this case the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod, makes exactly the same argument that we heard on Bill 3, it certainly causes members on this side to perk up and query whether in fact that's an accurate representation. It may well be that the hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod genuinely believes that, just as Bill 3 represented what he thought the industry wanted. I'm sure he's genuine when he says that Bill 6 represents what the industry wants, but for the reason I've mentioned, it's clear that on Bill 3 the industry didn't support all parts of it. I can tell you that the industry was quite exercised when they saw not only what the government had done but, more importantly, that the government had represented that that reflected the wishes of the industry. I'm here to tell the minister and all members that that didn't reflect the wishes of the industry, and that was a case where the industry was most displeased with that government initiative.

So what do we make of Bill 6, Mr. Chairman, as we look at it now? I'm disappointed that amendments that had been moved, that had been discussed earlier in second reading were not adopted by this House, but I respect the decision of the House.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

I think when I look at section 40 of this Bill, what we find, Mr. Chairman, is that we're relying again on regulations. What we're doing is we're making an amendment to section 40 and taking out a number of criteria, a number of conditions that were set out most clearly in the previous Bill. Now those are going to be deleted, and they're going to be dealt with by way of regulation. Well, why would we do it by way of regulation? All members will remember that we had a very long debate in this House when we were dealing with a Bill having to do with Labour. With respect to that particular Bill, what we saw were many members, not just on this side of the House but I think members on the other side as well, who had concern that what we're doing is abdicating the responsibility of this Chamber; we're leaving things to be done by way of regulation.

The difficulty with simply pushing too much into the realm of regulation and government by regulation is that this Legislative Assembly starts to lose control, Mr. Chairman; this Legislative Assembly isn't able to monitor those. Part of the reason for that is the fact that the standing committee on regulations, the committee on regulations chaired by the Member for Calgary-Shaw, has not met, to the best of my knowledge, in perhaps years. This isn't a question of weeks and months; it has not met for a very long time. So what we have, then, is a proposal, and certainly when we look at it in section 40, what we see is a government initiative to do more governing by way of regulation. We then juxtapose that or marry that circumstance with the reality we've got in this jurisdiction, where we see no effective monitoring by this Assembly or indeed even by the standing all-party committee on regulation. That committee is moribund; it's defunct. It exists only in the most nominal sense. So that gives us cold comfort. It gives cold comfort to those members that want to make sure that decisions and monitoring and supervision are being done in this Chamber, in a place where all Albertans are represented and where we have an effective kind of scrutiny, an effective kind of scrutiny that in effect is not possible now.

Mr. Chairman, I think that when we look at the provision in section 40 – it's in fact section 10; I misspoke myself. We should be referring to section 10 in the Act, which is substituting a new section 40 in the Mines and Minerals Act. I think it certainly would be available to the hon. minister or the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod in introducing this to come forward and say: "Look, the old section 40 doesn't quite fit the Bill. It requires some modification. It has to be adjusted in some fashion." I think members would certainly be prepared to work with the minister, work with the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod in terms of making adjustment to that, trying to find some way to ensure that the old section 40 is modified and updated so it addresses the particular mischief that's of concern to the government. That would have been, I think, a relatively easy thing to have done, and I think members would have been prepared to embrace that and work with it. What we have now, of course, is that section 40 takes out all of that direction and replaces it simply with one of these omnibus kinds of clauses, an omnibus delegating clause that simply says: we push that all onto regulation.

Well, I've raised this concern with respect to other Bills. It may be a signal, Mr. Chairman, how ineffectual I am and how ineffective I am in terms of communicating my concerns to the government, but be that as it may, I find I'm repeating the very same message I attempted to communicate to the government on previous Bills. I suspect I'm going to have occasion to stand in my place and reiterate the same message before the end of this session. Now, because the Minister of Energy is a minister I know to be not only resourceful but particularly industrious and I know takes her portfolio very seriously, I'm confident that when she has an opportunity to reflect and reread *Hansard*, both from the second reading debate as well as from the committee debate, the minister is going to go back to her deputy and go back to the policy advisers in her department and tell those people: "We're going to have to address more of the substance in the Bill. We don't want to deal with more empty vessels. We want to deal with lawmaking in this Chamber, not pass it on to the regulators to deal with." So I think that's an important principle we have to achieve.

5:00

Mr. Chairman, I am concerned with the prospect of injecting natural gas into subsurface caverns. I'm particularly concerned

with hydrogen sulphide gas. It's of interest to me that the member who introduced this Bill is the member who represents Pincher Creek, because I remember some 20-odd years ago maintaining a watching brief on behalf of a client at a series of hearings in Pincher Creek that had to deal with alleged hydrogen sulphide gas emissions from the plants in the Pincher Creek area, the Shell Canada plant, and the numerous, numerous complaints of ranchers and farmers in that area, people who believed that their children had adversely been affected, that their health had been adversely affected, that the health of their cattle and livestock had been adversely affected. When I saw the extent of the concern of those Albertans and the extent to which the governments seemed unable at that time . . . [interjections]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Order.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd hoped, frankly, that the good reason in my argument would capture the attention of all members, but I appreciate the assistance of the Chair as well.

As I was indicating, that was a most instructive experience for me talking to those landowners in the Pincher Creek area and listening to them and listening to – there was a very impressive battery of scientists and environmental experts that were brought into the Pincher Creek area. Those experts, those men and women spoke I thought very instructively and in a very comprehensive fashion about the kinds of problems that occur with hydrogen sulphide gas once it's been released and the enormous potential for damage to, as I said, livestock. There are few things, Mr. Chairman, more important in this province than the health of livestock, particularly in the Pincher Creek area.

Mr. Chairman, I'm particularly concerned that that does not seem to be sort of addressed in any sort of a frank and forward fashion in Bill 6, and I think that's a deficiency in Bill 6. I hope that before we finish the committee stage, there will be some members in this Assembly that will have had time to craft an appropriate amendment, because I think that sort of an amendment is useful, is necessary. I think that simply the public safety in this province demands that sort of a response. So I'm hopeful that before we finish dealing with Bill 6, we will see that.

Mr. Chairman, I've been speaking for a few minutes, and there may be some members who were out of the Chamber earlier, so I'd like to just go back and summarize the key points I've been attempting to make in the last short while. The first one is with respect to our history in this Chamber with Bill 3 and the problems we saw there, where in fact the industry had not been fully consulted on all aspects of the legislative initiative. We found that there were things the industry was most unhappy with. They were pleased that at least the opposition raised those concerns. I've had more than one person in a resource company tell me that he appreciated the fact the opposition was doing its work and picking up those kinds of shortcomings in government legislation with a view to making the legislation better.

I'm delighted to see that the Minister of Energy is paying such close attention to what's being said this afternoon, because I do have a great deal of confidence that she's going to be able to integrate some of these ideas.

So I would summarize then, Mr. Chairman. I've touched on the first thing, just to come back again. The second concern, then, had to do with section 10 and the fact that we're now subdelegating once again substantially more authority that's going to be dealt with by way of regulation instead of being dealt with properly or at least what I submit should probably be dealt with in terms of statute, not regulation. Then, finally, just my own personal experience in terms of talking to people who felt they'd

been victims of hydrogen sulphide, H<sub>2</sub>S, poisoning and the important environmental consequences and health hazards both to livestock and humans that flowed from that.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to surrender the floor to some other member to speak further.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am thankful for the opportunity to get up once again, because I forgot to express my concern in one more area when I spoke to Bill 6. I'm grateful for the fact that in committee stage we're entitled to that procedure and privilege.

Mr. Chairman, we had an amendment and we spoke to that amendment. I believe it was yesterday. That was with respect to section 26 of this Bill. I think I would not be fulfilling my duties correctly if I didn't also express my concern once again with respect to section 26 within Bill 6, and that is the fact that we have right at the end of this Bill a section that says, "The Natural Gas Royalty Regulation, 1994 . . . is validated, effective as of January 1, 1994." Now, we had an amendment that would have dealt with this and saw it defeated.

I think I have to once again reiterate that I am not pleased with the fact that section 26 could be thrown into the back of the Bill where it probably does not have any relevance whatsoever to the concept of this Bill, Bill 6. I think what we are doing is we're creating a whole bunch of mumbo jumbo in a whole bunch of different Bills. We saw that when we argued once before Bill 21, I think it was, with the Agricultural Development Corporation amalgamating with the Hail and Crop Insurance in that Bill. Then lo and behold right at the very end there was a section in there, section 56, which allowed for loan guarantees. Now, what did the one have to do with the other? This is no different here, Mr. Chairman. So when I look at that and I see us creating some kind of a Bill where we have whole different sections that are somewhat related perhaps but mostly unrelated, I think we're creating a terrible confusion for the future governments that are going to have to deal with this.

It was only yesterday or the day before that the minister of agriculture was talking about repealing certain Acts. I think there were eight or nine of them. We dealt with those, and with good reason perhaps we had to deal with those Acts and repeal those Acts. I think that if we looked at those Acts, you wouldn't be finding little hidden things in those Acts that would allow us not to repeal them. I think that when we look at this one perhaps 10 years down the road, somebody's going to be saying: "Oh, gee. Well, we can't repeal this Act, because guess what? There's a section in there – and that's section 26 – that relates to the natural gas royalty regulation. It was validated on January 1, 1994." Why can't we deal with that on its own merit? Why can't we put that aside and pull that out? Why is it that it's thrown in there?

Mr. Chairman, we are going to have to face the reality sooner or later that all Bills that are introduced in this Legislature have to deal with a certain subject, and that subject ought to be one subject, and it ought to be where we can deal and speak with this only with respect to the subject at hand. This Bill is flawed inasmuch as we have a section thrown in just for the heck of it. I think that is wrong, and we ought not to proceed because of that reason.

### 5:10

To reiterate some of the concerns that I had, particularly with respect to the amount of storage facilities that we have in the

province currently because that is a grave concern of mine. I'd hate to see storage facilities here, there, and everywhere, starting from High River and all the way up to High Level and up towards Lac La Biche and Fort McMurray and some in perhaps the Provost area and then all the way to Banff and Jasper. I mean, where do we draw the line with this thing? Currently we have, as far as I know, three commercial storage facilities, I believe: one in Suffield, one which is the Canadian Western Natural Gas Company – I don't know where that one is – and the other one is Amoco at Crossfield. Apparently, there are a number of gas producers using these existing reservoirs.

Again, my concern lies with respect to demand. Why is it that we're coming out with this thing now, and why is it that we are not limiting certain amounts of these underground storage facilities? Is it because we don't know the demand? Is it because we feel that it's an open season and we can allow anybody to go ahead and do whatever they'd like? Are there limitations as to how much they can store in each one of these facilities? There are questions that have to be answered here, Mr. Chairman, before we can allow something like this to go ahead.

That's the real problem with having to deal with these Bills: you really don't have the background information. What happens is we're told that we've got a research budget, and I guess maybe we all have to call upon our researchers to do the research for us in this case. But I think that's not right. I think what has to happen is that when the Bill comes forward to the members of this Legislature, we have to supply some background information as to why this Bill is required, not only Bills that are presented from the government side but I think Bills that are presented from the opposition as well. It would speed up the process, and it would clear up the confusion, because quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, there is confusion. There is a massive amount of confusion when a Bill comes forward without some background information and it's left up to the individual members to try and figure out what it's all about.

Another thing is: are these commercial storage facilities that are being proposed now going to be on Crown land, or is it going to be that anyone who has a piece of property would be able to open one of these up and start to sell the storage space, if you will? That has got to be a major concern, particularly the Crown lease land. Are these facilities going to be owned by the Crown then? I mean, are we going to sit back and say, "Let us charge for the storage"? If that is, I wonder if we're not going to privatize these things. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs ought to consider privatizing what we've already got if we do have some on Crown leased land. These questions definitely don't only come to my mind, Mr. Chairman, but they have to come to all members of the Assembly, and all members of the Assembly have to be thinking about what it is that we're really after here.

This government and the opposition included have often said that we would like to see us getting out of the business of being in business, so even the thought of charging a rental on storage facilities on Crown land for companies to be able to come in and utilize these wells, perhaps abandoned wells or underground storage facilities – we really have to expect that this could be a commercial venture in the making, and therefore we ought not to be in that business at all, Mr. Chairman.

So with those comments I'd now like perhaps maybe other hon. members to express their concerns. Thank you very much.

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have three issues to deal with, and then I'll sit down and let someone else



speak. The first issue that I have is – and I've discussed this with the member who introduced the Bill. As I go through this Bill and look at it in more detail, each time I look at it I see different things in here. The one thing that I have a concern with – and maybe it's because I'm not a lawyer – is the definition of what can be stored in these underground storage facilities. If I look on page 1 and look at one of the definitions offered in this draft Bill, it talks about fluid mineral substances. It says under the paragraph that's on the left hand side:

(f.2) "fluid mineral substance" means a fluid substance consisting of a mineral or of a product obtained from a mineral by processing or otherwise.

I know that we talked about storing natural gas, and the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod confirmed that this is in fact the case, but as I look through the rest of the Bill, it's not clear. I would like the Minister of Energy to possibly clarify that. Why is it so difficult to figure out what exactly can be stored in these underground storage facilities?

The second question that I had, Mr. Chairman, is prompted as a result of some telephone conversations that we've had, some calls stating that there was a concern about if in fact we can store gas. I'm led to believe that this Bill does in fact include the storage of natural gas and other gases. What happens with the storage of sour gas? The calls that we received – and these were from obviously nonindustry people – indicated a concern that if we start to store sour gas, gas containing hydrogen sulphide, what happens if there's a leak? Do we have total assurances that there won't be sour gas leaking into the environment, possibly into a farmer's field, into a farmer's water supply, that sort of thing? I must admit that in first looking at this Bill, we didn't think of that until someone called us. The concerned parties that called us have a legitimate concern.

What we think should maybe happen is that before an oil company is allowed to store sour gas in one of these underground storage facilities, possibly a public hearing should be held. I mean, the possibility could exist to store sour gas where there may be pressure leakages and leaking into the environment. Clearly, for people living in rural Alberta this is going to be a concern.

The last concern that I have – and it's not related to the first two – is that this government seems intent on charging fees for everything. As I think about this, what's happening? An oil company comes along. It's got to produce some gas. It takes the gas out of its well, and it reinjects it into one of these underground storage facilities for later sale. Has the province given consideration to possibly – and I might add this is underground. The mineral rights six inches below the surface are owned by the province, by the people of Alberta. Have they considered charging a fee for this underground storage? In other words, they're using what's available to the people of Alberta; possibly the oil company should be paying some sort of nominal storage fee.

Before I go on, I would like to maybe have those two concerns addressed. If I can summarize, where is it considered in here that fluid mineral substances include natural gas, and what are the minister's comments on injecting sour gas into these underground storage facilities?

Thank you.

5:20

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Chairman. One thing bothers me, and I think the hon. minister should take a moment and maybe talk to the member submitting the Bill, from Pincher Creek-Macleod. I think there's some sloppy draftsmanship that's gone

ahead, and maybe he should withdraw the Bill. Basically, here in Alberta, as you probably know, mineral rights are different from oil and gas rights, two different departments, but they cross. There's no question that when you have oil and gas concerns in Alberta, we have learned through the years to defer to the ERCB, the Energy Resources Conservation Board. As a general rule they're outstanding. They're used as an adviser all over the world. As a matter of fact, a couple of years ago I was on a project in the Philippines, for instance, and they rated the ERCB as one of the ones that they were drafting. They're just getting oil and gas on the west side down towards Indonesia now, and they were using the ERCB. They were talking to me about the ERCB and coming over to interview them. Likewise, in Ireland a few years ago I recommended the ERCB. I remember about a year ago that I was talking to the gentleman back there, and he said that one of the greatest things I'd ever done was recommend the ERCB. In other words, the ERCB is a world-renowned organization when it comes to looking after oil and gas law.

Yet this thing which says fluids and minerals in effect bypasses the ERCB. In other words, reservoirs can be created and caverns can be filled without the ERCB's permission. It says: by permission of the minister. Now, I know that the minister being the person she is would maybe never think of going ahead without the ERCB, but the minister should think that, heaven help us, we might end up with a Liberal minister of oil and gas or, worse still, the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca or something like that, you know. Anything could happen. Therefore, we're taking this whole idea of injecting caverns out of the ERCB's hands, who are people that can call hearings and can determine whether the liquid should go in a reservoir.

Now, the minister might think that all that goes into the reservoir are LPGs, but she should know that if it's a deep enough reservoir, LNGs can go in. That's liquid natural gas, which would go under higher pressure. Worse still, what can happen is a lot of oilfield waste going into our caverns, for instance sulphur compounds. That would scare you. Nobody's going to get scared with LPG getting loose out of a cavern, because all that'll happen is that your water well will look like a gigantic cigarette lighter maybe or something like that. You're not going to get poisoned by getting a little snort of LPG now and again, but if you do have some of the petrochemical derivatives, which may be 2,4-D or any of these others . . . [interjections] Sounds like somebody has been sniffing LPG. Sniffing gasoline: watch your liver, destroys your mind, and causes you to vote Tory. LPG is a little different. If you sniff LPG, you won't get into quite as much trouble.

Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that fluids of any description can be put into underground storage under this Bill without a public hearing, just a benign minister's permission. If we thought that it was important enough for the ERCB to give hearings on gas plants, give hearings on sulphur plants, give hearings on right-of-ways of pipelines, surely the ERCB should be in a position to pass on underground storage. The way this Bill has been crafted – and I doubt that the minister read it. I think she is sharp enough to note – although dreams of Napoleonic glory may make her want to have total authority to do everything without the ERCB, I think common sense would tell her that she would want the ERCB approving any injection scheme. This Bill, because it's under the Mines and Minerals Act, very clearly says that petroleum and natural gas rights don't apply, therefore the ERCB doesn't come in to question.

The Chairman has given me a sign that maybe time is running out. Trying to stop a locomotive on a dime is always hard, Mr. Chairman, but in view of the hour I would move that we adjourn debate.

Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. The hon. Member for Redwater has moved that we do now adjourn debate. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 6 and begs leave to meet again.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed. So ordered.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that we now adjourn and reconvene at 8 o'clock this evening in Committee of Supply.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Is the Assembly in favour of the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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