

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 31, 1994**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 94/05/31

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of this Assembly His Excellency the Hon. Maurice McTigue, high commissioner of New Zealand. Mr. McTigue is on a familiarization visit to Alberta. New Zealand and Alberta share a variety of common interests including a strong commitment to agricultural trade liberalization. Mr. McTigue is seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask that he rise and receive the recognition and warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure today to introduce to this Assembly a delegation of senior energy officials from Russia and other states of the former U.S.S.R. These officials have spent the last week visiting energy sites in our province and meeting with industry and government to learn more about the energy industry in the province of Alberta. Alberta is known world over for its energy expertise and supporting infrastructure. We are pleased to welcome the officials that are here today as well as the many others who come every year to Alberta to learn more about how our industry operates.

Mr. Speaker, we have with us today Mr. Peter Khramov, the deputy head of the main administration of oil and gas fields development and licensing from the Ministry of Fuel and Energy of the Russian Federation. We have Mr. Anatoly Kulakov, the division head of the main administration of oil and gas fields development also from the Ministry of Fuel and Energy of the Russian Federation. We have Rufat Mustafinov, the deputy head of administration for oil and gas resources, geology and licensing. We have Mr. Peter Postoenko, chief geologist and deputy general director of the Orenburg region oil production amalgamation. We have Michael Datsik, chief geologist and deputy general director. We have Sergei Popov, chairman of the committee for geology and resources management. We have Vladimir Karasev, deputy head of administration. We have Yuri Novikov, the translator. They are accompanied by two gentlemen well known to this Assembly: Mr. David Luff and Mr. Dan Philips.

I would ask them to all rise – they are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker – and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition today signed by several people in St. Albert and

the surrounding area, including Mayerthorpe and the Alexander reserve, who urge the government to take the Sturgeon general hospital out of the Edmonton health region.

Thank you.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Shaw I have a petition of 610 names urging the government to maintain the Alberta Children's hospital as it presently exists.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition from residents of St. Albert and the surrounding area asking the Premier, who claims to listen and care, to take decisive action and remove the Sturgeon general hospital from the Edmonton region.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to make sure the Minister of Health hits it into *Hansard*, and I present a petition asking the Minister of Health and the Premier to move the Sturgeon general hospital where it belongs.

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

MR. ZARIWNY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with 1,112 signatures obtained by and at Greenwood's bookstore on Whyte Avenue. This petition urges that the government of Alberta not single out a specific title for censorship.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on May 18 in relation to the Grey Nuns hospital be now read and received. It's the one that urges the government to maintain that hospital as an active, full-care, full treatment facility.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to maintain the Grey Nuns Hospital in Mill Woods as a Full-Service, Active Hospital and continue to serve the south-east end of Edmonton and surrounding area.

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I presented on May 11 concerning the location of the Children's hospital be now read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to maintain the Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary on its current site and as it currently exists as a full service pediatric health care facility.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on May 17 with regard to keeping the Grey

Nuns hospital open as an active care hospital now be read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to maintain the Grey Nuns Hospital in Mill Woods as a Full-Service, Active Hospital and continue to serve the south-east end of Edmonton and surrounding area.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented in this House on May 18 regarding prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation now be read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to amend the Individual's Rights Protection Act (IRPA) to include "sexual orientation," thereby reflecting the Vriend decision and bringing the IRPA in line with Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to request that the petition I presented on May 18 regarding seniors' issues be now read and received.

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.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to request that the petition I presented on May 16 be now read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government not to alter funding arrangements for Alberta's Seniors Lodges and Seniors Subsidized Apartments until Seniors have been consulted and have agreed to any revisions to funding arrangements.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I am giving notice that tomorrow I'll be moving that written questions stand and retain their places on the Order Paper with the exception of Written Question 201. I also give notice that I'll be moving that motions for returns stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, and 210.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I wish to give oral notice of the following government motion:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the spring sitting of the Second Session of the 23rd Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date for the fall sitting of the Second

Session of the 23rd Legislature as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

1:40

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A little housekeeping matter here. I would like to table the annual reports of the Department of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs for the fiscal years 1991, 1992, and 1993.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table with the Assembly today the response to Motion for a Return 184.

MR. ROSTAD: I'd like to table the '92-93 annual report for Alberta Justice and the '92-93 annual report for the Victims' Programs Assistance Committee.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 1992 annual report for Alberta Labour, copies of the Safety Codes Council 1993-94 annual report, and copies of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta 1994 annual report.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly 47 students who are here from the High Level public school. These students traveled almost 800 miles to be here today, and that's just about as far away as you can be from Edmonton to attend here. There are probably only three schools further away, and they're also in my constituency. They are accompanied today by their teachers Mr. Neale, Mrs. LaRocque, and Mrs. Klassen and also by parent supervisors Mr. Juneau, Mr. Bell, Mr. and Mrs. Brock, Mrs. Fehr, Mr. Siemens, Mrs. Giesbrecht, Mr. MacFarlane, Mrs. Thoreson, and Mrs. Milley. They are seated this afternoon in the members' gallery, and I'd ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the Assembly today a student who is working in the constituency office of Red Deer-North for the summer: Joy Reinheimer. She is accompanied by the Red Deer-North constituency office manager, a lady who, it's been said, is probably the best constituency office manager in Alberta. I would ask that Lynne Penney and Joy Reinheimer stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have a great deal of pleasure introducing to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 17 students from Alberta Vocational College, the Winnifred Stewart campus in the English as a Second Language program. Sir, they hail from some 11 different countries from the entire world. Along with some 220 other students that I've had the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to the members here, I would like to thank Canada for allowing them and inviting them to be part of Canada and would like to thank this government in particular for maintaining funding for the English as a Second Language program so that

they are able to contribute earlier to this great province. I'd like to invite them to please rise – they're in the public gallery – and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you a young man who has recently, because of the electoral boundary change, found himself in the Three Hills-Airdrie constituency instead of Drumheller. He's a graduate of the Prairie Bible Institute and is currently attending Liberty University in Virginia. He's working for me in my constituency office for the summer, and the most intriguing question he's asked me so far is, "Why would anybody vote Liberal?" That's good enough for me. Please rise.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake I'd like to introduce a group of people from the Spruce View school. There are 34 of them together, 10 adults and 24 students. They're seated in the public gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature three members from the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations office here in Edmonton. I'd ask them to stand when I introduce them. I'm not positive which gallery they're in. They are Toni Nahdee, Jody Arcand, and Stephanie Bishop. They're in the public gallery.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly this afternoon a bright young gentleman from Leduc, a constituent of mine who has had the pleasure of whetting his teeth at the Forum for Young Canadians in Ottawa about three weeks to a month ago. I would ask Michael Piva to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly this afternoon.

head: **Oral Question Period**  
**Party Leadership Campaign**

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, in an affidavit that was filed in this Assembly, Albertans learned that confidential lottery lists were used to make telephone calls to prospective applicants for lottery funds. The Auditor General has agreed to investigate the issue of telephone calls but says that he doesn't have the necessary authority to go any further, and we've learned that the Ethics Commissioner says that his hands are tied. He's not able to properly or cannot investigate. Mr. Premier, nice to see you back in Alberta in the Legislature. Would you tell Albertans, Mr. Premier, that you are prepared to broaden the terms of the investigation, because it's the issue of the use of confidential lists that is the critical thing in this whole matter, that you're prepared to direct the Auditor General to broaden that investigation to include his determining whether those lists were used?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm informed by the hon. Deputy Premier that no such lists were used. He called into question, I think very effectively, when I was in the Legislature,

by the way, last week the credibility of that particular witness or that particular person who signed the affidavit. I would suggest that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition has demonstrated his ineptness at really addressing the real issues. I can tell you that I have not had one phone call on this issue. You know why I haven't had a phone call? I've been in Alberta now for a considerable period of time. As a matter of fact, I've been out and about talking to people in this community. I haven't been here because when one spends too much time here, one catches that terrible disease called dome syndrome, and I think they've all got it over there because this is all they can talk about. Obviously, they are trying to get us off our agenda because they do not want us to be successful.

Mr. Speaker, the issues we're concerned about are elimination of the deficit, paying down the debt, and creating the climate for jobs, jobs, jobs.

MR. DECORE: It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that it's the responsibility not only of the members of this Assembly but particularly the Premier of Alberta to be here all the time with the rest of the members of this Assembly. If he thinks that fishing is his answer . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Supplemental question.

1:50

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, how many more people, how much more evidence do you need? We have an affidavit that is a statement under oath. We have statements made by a former minister of the Crown, and we have statements made by . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The rules are that we are to have one question at a time. The Chair did hear one or two or three questions asked. The Premier will have the opportunity of responding to one of them.

MR. DECORE: How much more evidence, how many more people do we need to come forward before you take the appropriate action, Mr. Premier, and direct that there be a proper investigation? The issue here is the use of confidential lists.

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all to respond to the preamble, Mr. Speaker – and he raised it, not me – the only fishing I did on the west coast was on a Sunday and a Monday, which happened to be a holiday, on my own time, at my own expense. I was attending my duties: drumming up business and speaking to investors in Vancouver, who have a tremendous amount of confidence, and attending the Western Premiers' Conference in Manitoba. Unlike the hon. member, I wasn't off yachting off the Cayman islands. I was attending to my duties.

Mr. Speaker, this matter has been referred to the Auditor General. Under the rules the Auditor General says quite clearly that anyone who wants to lodge a complaint can do so. I understand the hon. leader of the Liberal Party has lodged such a complaint. The Auditor General said that he will review it. This is his initiative. This is not our initiative. We have more important things to do, like getting rid of the deficit, like paying down the debt, like creating the climate for jobs, jobs, jobs.

MR. DECORE: I don't think anything could be more important than the possibility . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. DECORE: Will the Premier agree to broaden the investigation, to look at the issue of the use of government aircraft and other resources that were used to help elect the Premier as leader of the Conservative Party?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is utter nonsense, and the hon. leader of the Liberal Party is purely on a fishing trip. I'll tell you: will he agree in the House today at Liberal Party expense to have someone independent monitor the pending leadership review just to make sure that no Liberal makes phone calls out of his or her constituency office, that they are pure, that every time they want to make a phone call that is political of nature, indeed they run out and use a public telephone booth?

MR. DECORE: That's easy. If there were going to be one – and there won't be – we'd agree.

Mr. Speaker, there is now evidence that the former minister of agriculture was soliciting support for the Premier to become leader of the Conservative Party from a lottery fund applicant. A golf course executive in Bonnyville said that the soliciting of support was probably on the line. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. Mr. Deputy Premier, was it appropriate for a minister of the Crown to solicit support from lottery fund applicants or an applicant for political purposes?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no knowledge about what the hon. gentleman is talking about. There has been a news report, and that's certainly not at all what the news report said. That's the only source of information that the leader would have.

Mr. Speaker, it's kind of interesting, though, that the hon. member makes these allegations. I keep looking forward to these witnesses that are supposed to be coming forward. Last Wednesday we were all told that there was some person with four aliases who was coming forward. He failed to show. I gather the media was kept waiting a couple of hours. Thursday, Friday we were told that some big press conference was going to be held over the weekend by the Liberals. They were going to trot out somebody. It's my understanding that it hasn't happened.

Lo and behold, it's amazing what is coming out of the woodwork, Mr. Speaker, really quite amazing. Today in this building alone a very prominent Edmonton business leader Mr. Gordon Stamp showed up and said: lo and behold, Mr. Kowalski, I don't know what these Liberals are talking about; I'm a Liberal; I campaigned on behalf of the Liberal leadership candidate; I used offices in this building. He took the media and showed them where the offices were, and he said that he used public phones. He's here. That's a live person. Let's forget about the innuendo. Let's talk about real live people.

Mr. Speaker, if it's going to be helpful as well, Mr. Stamp even left a taped interview that I'm very, very happy to file so that the public can hear it firsthand. The gentleman can be contacted, in fact, here in Edmonton. He's quite happy to give interviews and tell anybody exactly what he did in the Legislature Building for the Liberals.

MR. DECORE: We're not afraid of an investigation. We didn't use confidential . . .

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

MR. DECORE: Mr. Deputy Premier, when you approved the Bonnyville golf course application, because it's you that had that authority, were you aware that the former minister of agriculture had solicited support from the people involved in that golf course, solicited support for the Premier to become leader of the Conservative Party? Are you aware of that?

MR. KOWALSKI: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely not at all. I have no way of knowing at all whether or not what the hon. leader is saying could be true.

Mr. Speaker, I have some more truth that might be of interest for people. You know, it's totally inappropriate for people to use government phone numbers and have civil servants actively involved as front men for political parties, but here is an individual who worked in a particular department of the government, a fellow by the name of Frank Mullen, phone number 427-7908, who's acting as a spokesman for the Whitemud Liberal Party and putting out and saying that anybody who wants to find out information about Liberal activities, finally phone the office of a civil servant in the province of Alberta. Totally inappropriate. This is fact. This is proof, and I'd be very, very happy to file this too. Then if anybody wants to undertake a review, they can do it as well. [interjections]

2:00

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Deputy Premier, were there other lottery grants that you approved, like you approved the Bonnyville grant, where pledges of support for the Premier were solicited and secured?

MR. KOWALSKI: Absolutely none, Mr. Speaker. There were none. There's no relationship whatsoever. This is a long shot based on innuendo and a lot of imagination and a lot of fantasy. That is not the way this government does business. That is not the way this particular minister does business.

Oh, by the way, Mr. Speaker, they want telephone lists. I even got the Liberal telephone list, and it arrived in a brown bag to me. Really interesting. Talk about fishing trips: Guadeloupe; Anacortes, Washington, where you can rent nice pleasure boats. Please. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. [interjections] Order. The Assembly will recess for four minutes.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:03 p.m. to 2:07 p.m.]

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

#### National Petroleum Show

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The National Petroleum Show will be held in Calgary this year from June 14 to 16. Now, in addition to the many oil company representatives that will be attending the show, the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism plans to send about 60 – six, zero – representatives from his department at a taxpayer cost of about \$90,000. My first question to the Deputy Premier: what possible

justification could there be for spending this kind of money to send these department staffers on a five-day jaunt to Calgary?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised we're only sending that many, considering that this is the largest international oil show, to my knowledge, in the world. Secondly, the amount and the importance of the oil and gas industry to this province is absolutely profound. Yesterday I tabled in this House and I filed the 1994-1995 Alberta Global Business Plan. That plan talks about the natural resources of oil and gas, but as significantly, as importantly, that plan talks about the engineering expertise in this province. Just a few days ago the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services filed the annual report of the association of Consulting Engineers of Alberta; they talk about the international opportunities. A few minutes ago in this Assembly the Minister of Energy introduced a high-powered delegation from a former state in the Soviet Union. They're here in numbers because we have technology, we have engineering expertise, and we are prepared to share and sell that to the world.

The dividends and the dollars that are coming to this province on a daily basis, on a monthly basis, on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker, from our expertise is absolutely profound. We've created over 40,000 new jobs in one year because of that.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, I'm glad he finally recognized we have a Department of Energy in this province.

My supplementary question is: given the tough economic times, given the fact that the oil industry is virtually self-promoting, what concrete benefits can this minister show that Alberta taxpayers got from his department's officials participating in previous years that justify the exposure this year?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, this is a team that we operate in. This Alberta 1994-95 Global Business Plan is the result of a compendium of all departments in our government working together. I can go on for hours talking about those kinds of specifics, and I'm prepared to do so. There is someone who has a better hands-on view of that than me at this moment, and that's the Minister of Energy. I'm going to ask her to supplement the answer, Mr. Speaker.

**2:10**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most important shows in all of the world that occurs here in Calgary. Just to remind the hon. member of the benefits that accrue to Albertans as a result of this, last year this industry brought in over \$5 billion of direct capital investments into this province. We are a team, and it is very important, as we show our wares in our new technology and enhancements and our trade, that we have the international side of it brought into Alberta and we promote the Alberta advantage. What does that mean to the people of Alberta? It means that there's economic development that occurs, not only directly but as a spin-off to that development from the oil and gas sector. That means jobs right here in Alberta. If it's not important to the Liberals to promote that, I'm sorry. I feel sorry for you. But for people in Alberta, over \$5 billion in direct capital investment last year was very important, and we need to have that come into Alberta again this year.

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My issue is not with respect to the show; it's with respect to the Department of Economic Development and Tourism involvement.

My final supplementary is to the Provincial Treasurer. Is this kind of expenditure that I just referred to the kind of misuse of Economic Development and Tourism dollars that the Treasurer referred to in his speech to the Alberta chamber of commerce in Red Deer last Friday?

MR. DINNING: The minister of economic development and probably the Minister of Energy would want to supplement, Mr. Speaker, but when one spends \$90,000 and gets as a dividend, or a return, on that \$90,000 some \$5 billion worth of investment, I think that's a very good rate of return.

MRS. BLACK: I don't know whether it's just a lack of understanding of how critical the development of our natural resources is in this province, but I can tell you that last year alone, Mr. Speaker, over 7,000 wells were drilled in the province of Alberta, which translated into over 20,000 direct jobs. What also occurred through the direct teamwork of this government was the relocation of many of the head offices to this province. What also occurred was an awareness that Alberta is the main hub in this industry. What also occurred last year was an awareness that Alberta is a main player in an integrated gas market system that involved the development of all of our departments together so that today Alberta has 12 percent of the U.S. market in natural gas. This is critical to Alberta.

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

#### Heritage Savings Trust Fund

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see the end of the cheap political posturing and talk about something that is precious to all Albertans, and that is not \$6,000 for phone calls, not \$90,000 but \$50 million in the heritage fund. When will the Provincial Treasurer tell this House that he's going to wake up and eliminate capital project spending from the heritage trust fund?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to the fact that some \$50 million is being invested from the heritage savings trust fund into various capital projects such as cancer research, irrigation rehabilitation, water management: very important projects. That is how the heritage fund value in fact has been reduced by some \$50 million in 1993-94. The member makes a very good observation, one that I would hope we would consider over the weeks and months ahead as we head into the '95-96 budget season: perhaps the heritage fund should no longer be the source of funds for these important capital project investments and that instead they would come out of the general revenue fund so that we are able to protect the real value of the heritage savings trust fund.

MR. SMITH: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that capital spending is not the path to a balanced budget, what role does the Treasurer intend for the heritage fund in erasing this increasing debt to all Albertans?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, members should know that the balanced budget plan presented by this government in February is on track, and it's going to stay that way. Secondly, what we've got to do is balance the budget by '96-97. We've got to answer the question: how are we going to deal with the accumulated debt? Do we simply manage it, or do we pay it off, as most Albertans would think of their mortgage? Do we pay

off that mortgage? What is the role of the heritage fund in that larger context in thinking through the elimination of that debt? We have to balance that off. Do we take what the Liberals have suggested: we sell off and simply push away the heritage fund and not have it anymore and pay down the debt? Or is it there for the benefit of future generations so that our children and our grandchildren can also benefit from it?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, do I detect a natural bias in this, or does in fact the Treasurer intend to listen to other financial minds in Alberta as to the disposition of the heritage fund?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will listen to all Albertans. We'll take advice from Albertans and people outside of our province. The heritage fund was created in 1976. I think it is probably one of the greatest legacies of the Lougheed government in having the foresight to create the heritage savings trust fund that is there to benefit not only today's Albertans but future Albertans. Yes, if you want to know my bias, I'm in favour of keeping the heritage savings trust fund. I'm not like the Liberals across the way who want to blow it all.

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

#### **School Act Amendments**

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has stated that Bill 19 will not give separate school boards any more options regarding student funding than that given to public boards. Currently the foundation grants and the local taxes make up 75 percent of school board funding, which is controlled at the local level. Now we see that public boards are taking this government to court because they're afraid of losing local control of education. My question to the minister is: will the minister commit that under his new plan 75 percent of school funding will be controlled at the school board level?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly 75 percent. In fact, I expect about 97 or 96 percent of the funding flowing from the government is going to go to school boards in this province, as it currently does. Certainly one of the goals that we have in developing a fiscal plan, a fiscal framework for provincial funding of education will take in the need for maximum flexibility for school boards so that they can allocate money on a site-based management basis very effectively to the schools and students of this province.

Mr. Speaker, we are currently under way with our development of a fiscal framework in this province. We're working with the stakeholders. We're working with, as part of that stakeholder's group, the school boards of this province, and they're going to be involved in designing that fiscal framework. Certainly the need for maximum flexibility and for latitude for school boards is being taken into consideration right now.

MR. HENRY: So in other words, Mr. Speaker, he doesn't know quite yet.

My next question is to the minister. When separate boards choose to opt out or not participate in the central fund and collect their own taxes, will they have the flexibility to allocate those taxes as they see fit? Or is he going to tell them how to spend their local money?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hon. member's introductory remark . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, you're still talking about the last question. We're on another subject.

The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I first of all would like to point out that the hon. member across the way, when in doubt about something, says, "You should have more consultation; more consultation." Now it would seem that the member across the way wants us to make a quick, arbitrary decision with respect to the design of a provincial funding framework.

With respect to the Alberta school foundation fund, it is clearly outlined that this will be a fund which is specifically identified in the finances of the province. It will be monitored by an audit committee, which is provided for in Bill 19. Further, the method of allocation is already stated in terms of being on a per pupil basis across this province, and that per pupil amount of money will certainly have to be spent on education. I can assure you of that. That is the approach with respect to the use of the local tax base.

**2:20**

MR. HENRY: Mr. Speaker, this government doesn't know the meaning of consultation.

I'd like to ask the minister why he doesn't simply stop playing chicken with the public school boards in this province and phone them today to negotiate an agreement so that they can control their own school system rather than ending up spending taxpayers' money in the court system.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the school boards of this province are going to be funded equitably. There's going to be an emphasis on money flowing to the student. That is the plan. That is the work that I want to get on with. I do not see the need for legal wrangling and legal cases with respect to this. It is important for school boards in this province to get on with the business of education. The funding framework is provided for, and I certainly do not want to be diverting from the direction that we have set, which is for the betterment of education in this province, and get tied up in needless legal wrangling.

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

#### **Agriculture Safety Net Programs**

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of my constituents have been calling and meeting with me lately to express their dissatisfaction with the existing agricultural safety net programs, most notably GRIP. While they acknowledge that GRIP has served a purpose, my constituents feel that the time for this type of program has passed and that we need to move to a different type of farm support program. Could the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development tell this House when we will move into a whole-farm safety net program that better meets producers' needs?

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie. We are in the process of moving from the GRIP safety net process into a new and defined process. During the Creating Tomorrow process and during the Toward a Business Plan roundtable discussions with the

agricultural community they clearly identified that GRIP was not a satisfactory safety net solution for their needs. So with that in mind we are now in the process of reviewing our whole safety net programs. We've withdrawn from the tripartite for the beef industry. We've withdrawn from the tripartite for the hog industry as well as the sheep industry. We are now redesigning a new program.

MS HALEY: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: are the safety nets the only item being discussed at these roundtable meetings, or will other policy reforms be considered?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The roundtable meetings are structured so that they indeed will deal with other items such as the safety net programs. Simply because the safety net programs are . . . [interjections] Do you want to answer the question? It's unfortunate, because there's an agricultural community out there, Mr. Speaker, that needs to know the answer.

The concern with the safety nets, of course, reflects also in the regulatory process, because indeed once you've made changes in the regulatory process, there is a snowballing effect that reflects on the rest of the processes that are in place. We also have to look at items such as transportation, the regulatory process of WGTA, the regulatory process of the Canadian Grain Commission. We have to look at items such as the Wheat Board, the labour unrest, the process of moving the product under the regulatory processes that we have today. We'll be featuring the safety net process because it also entwines with the regulatory process that is in place. So we'll be dealing with the whole gamut of regulatory processes that are creating consternation to the agricultural community today.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister advise as to when these meetings will be held and where the minister will be using the information gathered at these public forums?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The meetings will be held in six key parts of the province. They will be held starting the 9th of June in Vermilion, the 13th of June in Olds, the 14th of June in Taber, the 15th of June in Hanna, the 20th of June in Westlock, and the 22nd of June in Fairview. The results will be tabulated, and we will be taking those results to the agricultural ministers' conference that will be held the first week of July in Winnipeg.

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

### Principal Group Collapse

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Questions have been raised over the failure of the Attorney General's department to lay criminal charges in the collapse of the Principal Group. There is an important issue at stake here. The public have the right to be skeptical of the impartiality of a process in which a government department in effect assesses whether charges are to be laid which might reflect on the conduct of current or former ministers and Premiers. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. Will the minister confirm that between June and November of 1991 members of the RCMP had requested permission from the department on several occasions to lay criminal charges, since at that time they had come to believe that a crime had been committed?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no. But in the context of my answer yesterday when I said that there are throughout an investigation small threads of things that go along that look like there might be something and when they finish their investigation they very well find out that there isn't: there might have been that incident. But I am not aware of any RCMP report coming forward and saying that there should be a prosecution.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the public then have confidence that the Justice department would lay charges in this case, since it was likely that the actions or lack thereof of various ministers and Premiers might enter the case possibly as a defence by the accused?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly appreciate the hon. member trying to bring forward on the behalf of investors in Principal Group the unfortunate circumstance that there isn't evidence to come forward with criminal charges, but I'd ask him to go up and meet with the assistant commissioner of the RCMP and talk to them. They in fact do the investigation. What the Attorney General's department has done is receive the report and recommendations of the RCMP and acted on that basis, and that was: there is not sufficient evidence with which to prosecute criminal charges.

DR. PERCY: Would the minister confirm, then, that it was the decision of his department and his department alone not to proceed with charges in this case?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, no, I would not confirm that. As I mentioned very clearly yesterday, there's a report that comes from the investigating agency. If you removed it from the Principal Group, it could be the Edmonton city police or it could be the Calgary city police. They investigate a matter. They bring forth a report. On the basis of that report in conjunction with the Attorney General's department and the RCMP a decision is made whether there's culpable evidence with which to prosecute. In this instance it was based on the RCMP report that there is not sufficient evidence.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

### Gun Control

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Justice as well. This Assembly recognizes the importance of firearms to the daily lives of farmers, hunters, trappers, aboriginal people, people that have accomplishments with the Alberta shooting team at the international level, as well as other important sporting and economic benefits of firearms. Albertans have proven themselves to be competent and safe owners and users of firearms. Can the Minister of Justice indicate whether or not he has been able to convey the need for consultation with the provinces in regard to the changes to the firearms legislation that significantly increase the administrative costs to the province?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, gun control is within the jurisdiction of the federal government. At our recent federal/provincial meeting of ministers of justice the item was on the agenda, brought up in a cursory manner. I can assure the hon. member that not only the minister from Alberta but other ministers said

that if any changes are made to the gun control laws, the people of the various jurisdictions should in fact be consulted.

**2:30**

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you. Will the minister relay the strong message of the provincial firearms association, who strongly believe that the residents of both urban and rural Alberta should continue to enjoy the lawful and responsible use and ownership of firearms in this province?

MR. ROSTAD: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm certain that at the next meeting sometime this fall of the federal and provincial ministers the representations made by this group will be on the agenda front and centre. I can assure the hon. member that I will in fact bring forward the recommendations that they have brought forward as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

MR. FISCHER: That's fine.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

#### **Timber Shipments to British Columbia**

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Deputy Premier. Presently 15 percent of all logs harvested in this province are exported to B.C. Now, as of May 1 the B.C. government has just raised their stumpage fees by as much as 79 percent. This will put extra pressure on B.C. mills to buy more Alberta logs. When we export logs, we are losing jobs. My question to the minister responsible for economic development: what actions will your department take to offset the extra pressure from B.C. mills to seek more Alberta logs?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, there are actually three initiatives under way, and they're being done in consort with the Minister of Environmental Protection in the province of Alberta on the basis of advice from one of the standing policy committees of the government caucus. Number one, this matter was raised recently by ministers meeting in internal trade across the country of Canada. Next week we'll be meeting in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and I'll be talking to my counterparts from the government of British Columbia about this matter additionally.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, recently both the Minister of Environmental Protection and I met with representatives of the Alberta Forest Products Association and indicated to them that one of the reasons that it was attractive for Albertans to sell their private ownership – and remember these are logs that come off privately owned land – one of the reasons that it was of benefit to Alberta farmers and landowners to sell these logs to British Columbia is that British Columbia mills were in fact paying more for those logs than members of the Alberta Forest Products Association who were dealing with them. So in a free enterprise marketplace, if the prices went up and they became more competitive, in fact those logs would stay in Alberta.

The third point, Mr. Speaker – and all members would have seen this just recently – in the proposal verification that went out for Tolko Industries in the High Prairie area, there was not enough timber given to fully, 100 percent, satisfy the requirements of that mill. Under the request for proposals that are

currently out for the Grande Prairie timber development area, we have not given 100 percent of the required timber for the plant that the proponents will want to build. In other words, they will be driven to buy locally.

MR. LANGEVIN: Mr. Minister, would you be looking at raising the stumpage fees in this province to match the B.C. government fees?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the overall review that the Minister of Environmental Protection took recently basically set new standards for the industry in the province of Alberta. But recently he informed me that he is going to be looking at that overall area additionally, bearing in mind the initiative that recently has been taken in the province of British Columbia with respect to this matter. Stumpage fees are one way of solving the problem.

The other way of solving the problem is to recognize that it is a competitive environment. If a producer of timber, someone who grows trees on his land, privately owned land, can sell that product at a higher price over there, then it's incumbent upon the other competitors to match their price to that same level instead of coming to government and saying, "Would you put something artificial in here to distort the marketplace?" This is a free enterprise government, Mr. Speaker. It believes very much in the marketplace, and it does not want to bring in new initiatives that in fact distort the marketplace.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental?

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury.

#### **Social Assistance**

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Family and Social Services has reported the reduction of the welfare caseload of some 30,000 over the past year. I acknowledge that there are more people involved in education upgrading and retraining than ever before. However, my question deals with the appeal process. To the minister: what emphasis has been placed on the appeal process to be certain that those truly unique needs situations are being heard?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, we do have a very efficient and active appeals process for our clientele. In fact, when the welfare reforms were introduced just a bit over a year ago, we had anticipated at the time that the appeals would actually increase. It actually went the other way. Actually, the appeal hearings and the need for appeals decreased. In fact, last June we heard 847 appeals; last month there were only 589 appeals. Since the welfare reforms were announced and the new regulations went into effect, in fact the appeals dropped on the average of 200 per month.

MR. BRASSARD: Can the minister assure this Assembly that those in appealable circumstances are being heard by qualified, trained committee members on those panels?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have very highly qualified appeal panel members from all walks of life in general. We have at least 280 individuals across the province, and they're to be commended for the fine work they do. These panel groups are normally four to five people. When in fact an appeal has to be heard, we call only three of the members to come up at one time.

People that are appointed to these panel boards are MLAs, opposition MLAs, the public at large, Mr. Speaker. Some people



write in and ask to sit on the appeal board. In fact, a former opposition member from this House, who was very well qualified and does a fine job on the Edmonton appeal panel, is one member I have. That just shows you an example of the types of people we have sitting on our appeal panels.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

The time for question period has expired.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

#### **Abuse of Senior Citizens**

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to speak on behalf of a group of people who are unable to speak for themselves. These are the frail elderly, who rely on others to provide even their most basic care. For these people the increasing incidence of elder abuse is a very important issue.

A recent study by the National Advisory Council on Aging indicates that there are enough complaints and investigations of deaths and injuries in nursing homes, homes for the aged, and even in acute care hospitals to know that the problem is real. Besides individual threats of physical violence by staff, abuse in institutions can include the inappropriate or excessive use of physical or chemical restraints such as geri-chairs, bed railings, and sedatives.

Right here in our own province we have examples of abuse in the care of our frail, dependent elderly. Some sources say that elder abuse and neglect is indeed rampant. There is very little accountability. No one is disciplined. Criminal charges are virtually never laid.

In Alberta no one has a judicial mandate to address seniors injustices. The elderly have made an invaluable contribution to our country. We owe them a debt which can never be repaid. The aged are the ones who endured hardship: the great Depression, fought two World Wars, and faithfully paid their taxes. Theirs was a difficult and arduous life. They deserve our honour and respect.

I call on this government to conduct a full public investigation regarding allegations of abusive care of the elderly. Investigation findings should be made public, followed by appropriate legislation if findings are positive. Our elderly deserve no less.

#### **2:40 Restructuring the Bureaucracy**

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the leadership of our Premier Albertans have been privileged to be part of a rare time, a time in which government is redefining and restructuring its role. In Taber-Warner the people elected to school, hospital, and municipal boards have become willing participants in this process. In many instances the restructuring has actually meant that board members are working themselves out of the jobs that they were chosen to do.

However, while the restructuring occurs at the grassroots level, a major concern of my constituents is that the bureaucracy in Edmonton may actually not be restructured. Institutions in Taber-Warner bit the bullet and are actually taking their fiscal responsibilities seriously. For example, in one of the hospitals in my constituency 30 percent of the staff were laid off. As well, the administrator and the director of nursing positions were eliminated. This sends a clear message that the budget of that hospital will be reduced and the administration will do its job.

Compare that to the situation in the Edmonton bureaucracy. Although there have been some job losses, a lot have come through attrition. There has been little restructuring in the bureaucracy. My constituents do not see the same attempt to reduce administration and to cut costs throughout the layers and layers of bureaucracy. If at the end of this mandate the same bureaucratic system is still intact, it will be ready to expand as soon as those elected to power ease off. Furthermore, government support in Alberta will not remain. Let us be sure that we do lose an opportunity to restructure the bureaucracy in Edmonton.

Thank you.

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

#### **Festival Place**

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce hon. members to Festival Place, the new arts and culture and business centre in Sherwood Park. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers and supporters of Festival Place who helped our community realize a dream.

Festival Place was officially opened on May 14, 1994. The official opening was celebrated with a gala week of activities including concerts, dances, a kids' day, a seniors' jamboree, and a special salute to the Festival Place volunteers and supporters. It was a great week, and I was delighted to be among those who celebrated this event.

The idea for a festival place began in 1984 when the need for a cultural facility became apparent. Over the next decade Strathcona county, the Strathcona County Cultural Foundation, the provincial government, the federal government, and many private sponsors made Festival Place happen. The efforts and contributions of all are greatly appreciated.

Festival Place is a state-of-the-art theatre and stage. The stage is equipped with sophisticated sound and lighting systems unparalleled in stages of this size. The theatre is surrounded by a convention area, meeting rooms, and workshops to meet the multifaceted needs of its users. Festival Place is located in the Broadmoor Lakes park in the heart of Sherwood Park.

Festival Place stands as a reminder to us that creative ideas, a collective vision, teamwork, and perseverance ultimately do pay off. I believe Sherwood Park and Strathcona county are better communities because of Festival Place, and I am very proud to be a part of this community. Mr. Speaker, once again congratulations to all who made Festival Place happen.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Notices of two points of order have been received by the Chair. The first to be received was from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

#### **Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers**

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my point of order I want to refer to *Beauchesne* 493(4).

The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply.

Mr. Speaker, in the Deputy Premier's references, careless references, I might add, to a Mr. Frank Mullen associated with the Edmonton-Whitemud constituency, he implied that Frank Mullen was a government employee. Obviously, his reference

came from the Alberta Liberal Simpson Bulletin dated November 1, 1990, a copy of which I had sent over to me. In this particular document it refers to November 26, Monday, Whitemud annual general meeting at the Vernon Barford school, and at the bottom there's a handwritten note here.

Would the [worker] offer to explain why the Liberal Party of Alberta uses Government of Alberta phone numbers for blatant political party activity and why a . . . Frank Mullen – a civil servant – is using a Gov't phone to deal with enquiries about Liberal Party activities?

Well, Mr. Frank Mullen has never, never worked for the government. He works for a corporation. Interestingly enough in this particular document, which has been tabled by the Deputy Premier, it says: "For information contact Frank Mullen (427-7908)." Unfortunately, there's a typo there. Frank Mullen's home number, which I'm very familiar with, having known him for years, is off by one digit. So it was a typo in the Alberta Liberal Simpson Bulletin.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that the Deputy Premier had an obligation to check his reference material just a bit more quickly rather than jump to the conclusion that a person is a civil servant because they have an incorrect phone number listed, a 427. I think that is shameful that an innocent member of the public is cast upon in this House in that fashion, and I would ask that you urge the Deputy Premier to withdraw that remark and apologize to Mr. Frank Mullen for any negativity cast upon his fine reputation.

MR. DAY: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, referring to people outside the Assembly, there have been a number of incidences in which people have been referred to and the gentleman just mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. There was another extensive reference with an accompanying signed statement and a taped statement about another gentleman who actively and freely said that he was indeed within this building working on a Liberal leadership campaign. So there have been a number of names referred to and a number of people and situations referred to.

If that is to be the case, in terms of if there was an error – and I don't know that there was; we'll have to look at that. The point of order suggests that there should be a withdrawal, yet there have been a number of cases raised right here in the Assembly where among the petitions that are presented by the Liberals opposite, they don't bear any true resemblance to the statements that are made. They find out that the names are not accurate. They find out that the people indeed didn't even say that, and they have to contact us to say: please tell those Liberals to stop with these ridiculous petitions that are wrongly based.

So if anybody is talking about people from outside the Assembly with no basis in fact, the Liberals are definitely setting the pace. As a matter of fact, they're way out in front on this, not that one is better than the other. These things need to be checked. But in that reference and point of order I suggest that there's no point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is certainly correct that *Beauchesne* paragraph 493(4) is very important. But the Chair would say that names of individuals have been coming from both sides of the House, and perhaps this is a good time to remind hon. members that this is an important matter. The Chair does feel, however, that Mr. Mullen's name has been in no way impugned, if in fact the information provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is correct. At least the Chair doesn't believe there's any stigma to people who hold executive offices in either political

party represented in this House. But the fact is that it appears the information was incorrect as disclosed by Liberal Party literature in regards to the phone number. The phone number would indicate to anybody looking at it that it was a government number as it was printed. Nevertheless this instance does remind all hon. members that they should really check the veracity of any document that they refer to before referring to it in the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

### Privilege Confidentiality of Telephone Records

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek permission to prepare a written notice on a point of privilege, and I cite 15(1) and (2). I believe my parliamentary rights as a parliamentarian have indeed been infringed upon. If indeed the Deputy Premier has access to phone bills that clearly show incoming and outgoing calls to my legislative office, my democratic rights and Albertans' democratic rights have been violated. So I'm seeking permission to prepare a written notice.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The Chair will accept the notice.

### Orders of the Day

#### Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### 2:50 Bill 214 Members of the Legislative Assembly Remuneration Review Commission Act

[Adjourned debate May 25: Mr. Brassard]

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

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My presentation was almost complete the other day, but I would like to just reiterate one or two things. I mentioned that there is nothing more distasteful than trying to establish your own wages and salary structure in public office. It is shunned as much as possible and avoided, as a matter of fact, as much as possible by almost every official in government office. Having said that, we all recognize that regardless of who does the study, it is still going to come back to this Assembly to be voted on. We already have such a study in process. It was hired out with Peat Marwick to be done at a cost of something just under \$200,000. That report has not been acted on as yet, and to be considering an additional committee to do so would be ridiculous. I urge every member to reject this Bill.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been interesting listening to the various comments made by members on both sides. I wanted to make some observations from my own perspective. I had the unique experience of running for election in 1992 in a by-election. I guess there's only one other member in the Chamber who also had a similar experience in fighting an election during the first part of 1992. This was shortly after the whole business of MLA pensions had become public, not only that but the whole business of MLA housing allowances for non-Edmonton MLAs.

When I went to a little over 10,000 doors in Calgary-Buffero in the three and a half months leading up to the July 1992 by-

election, I had that unique opportunity to get an awful lot of feedback in terms of Albertans' concerns. I can't say that every Calgarian at every door that I spoke to was focused on this issue, but I'll tell you that there were an awful lot of Calgarians that had a great deal to say about what they felt about MLA compensation. When I say compensation, I also include the housing allowance.

### Privilege

#### Allegations against a Member

MR. N. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater rising on a point of order.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I just received a copy of what the Deputy Minister filed in the House, and it says:

It was in the evening that, well Nick was never there, I want to make that perfectly clear, that, that Nick at no time, I believe knew these phone calls were going on.

So what I'm getting at is that the Deputy Premier in his well-known style was misleading the House, arguing that I was making phone calls. Indeed, it was an employee. He's tabled the evidence, and the evidence says that I knew nothing about it.

I just wanted to make the point of order for the record, and there may be another point of privilege to see if we can put away the Deputy Premier. He keeps running off at the mouth and only giving out half the information.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Is the hon. member raising a point of order or giving notice of a possible point of privilege?

MR. N. TAYLOR: That's right. I'm doing both. The hon. greenhorns at the back don't understand that their previous Speaker ruled that a point of privilege had to be given notice on the same day, otherwise it couldn't go ahead. The only way you can get the floor is by raising a point of order. You can't stand up and say, "Point of privilege." You get the floor by point of order, and then you announce that you're going with the privilege. Now, I'm not trying to be supercilious about it, but that's the way it works.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not unaccustomed to getting a spirited reaction from members opposite. This is the first time I've got a reaction from a member of my own caucus.

### Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I was relating the unique experience I'd had in the Calgary-Buffalo by-election in 1992 and the extent to which Calgarians wanted to talk to me about this whole business of MLA compensation. I took some lessons from that. I also took some lessons from the president of the Lethbridge Progressive Conservative Constituency Association, who made, I thought, one of the more eloquent presentations to the all-party panel on freedom of information when I was there with the Member for Rocky Mountain House, who chaired that particular panel. I'm sure the Member for Rocky Mountain House will remember that president of the Lethbridge Progressive Conservative Constituency Association addressing us. He gave us statistics in terms of a survey that showed how little confidence Albertans had, not just people in Lethbridge, in institutions and the people that are elected to serve them. He talked about the

importance of being credible, and he talked about the importance of trying to restore a degree of trust between legislators and the people they're representing.

I take the lessons from both of those experiences: the canvassing of the neighbours of the Member for Calgary-Currie and my experience from listening to the president of the Lethbridge constituency association. What they wanted was a sense that MLAs were not running a closed shop, that MLAs were in fact working a whole lot harder and a whole lot better to be responsive and accountable.

I have to say – and I say this with all due respect to the members past and present on the Members' Services Committee – that I simply don't think that is an agency which Albertans have invested with any degree of confidence. And why should they invest it with much confidence? If you look at the little booklet that's produced that sets out the terms of MLA compensation and remuneration, it's hard to imagine a more patchwork, inconsistent kind of regime of provision for expenses. It's not logically consistent in terms of the kinds of compensation that are provided, and it does look very much, as one of my colleagues had said the other day, like it's a bit of a hodgepodge. It's a mix of things that have accrued over a period of time, not things that have been put together in a thoughtful fashion.

So I think it's a big mistake for members in this Assembly – and we've heard a number on the government side who've said, "Well, the Members' Services Committee is the appropriate agency to fix MLA compensation." I just have to tell you that I disagree strongly. I think that a committee of MLAs sitting around to determine what they should be paid is completely as unsatisfactory as a group of MLAs sitting around determining what their electoral boundaries should be. There is such an enormous degree of self-interest, the naked self-interest that's evident, that we shouldn't be surprised when Albertans say that they simply don't put any confidence in that process.

On July 20, you know, we had the promise by the Premier to set up an independent commission. October 4 we had the letter from the Leader of the Official Opposition requesting that commission be set up. I know that much has been made of the fact that there had been the Peat Marwick survey, but I think all members in this Assembly know that when you commission a survey, the survey only responds to the questions that you ask them to look at. The survey is only as extensive or as narrow as the people commissioning the study allow it to be. I think that on those counts the Members' Services Committee drew too narrow a boundary in terms of what was to be undertaken by the Peat Marwick study. As a consequence I find that it's of limited value to us now.

**3:00**

I've heard a number of members say that in the past members of the Liberal caucus have taken a position that there should not be an independent commission, and much has been made of certain comments made on August 28, 1989, by one of my colleagues who then was on the Members' Services Committee. It seems to me to be a foolish proposition that because that may have been a position put forward in good faith by a member in 1989, we can't learn and in fact opt for a different approach subsequently. It wasn't so long ago that in fact it was a Progressive Conservative government that insisted there was no need for freedom of information in Alberta. Well, Albertans should be fortunate that the government has reconsidered and they've now decided that it is an important matter and that kind of a Bill is essential.

We've got 25 new members in this caucus, and I don't think they consider themselves bound by a decision made, albeit in good

faith, in 1989. We've had the experience. I had the experience in the Calgary-Buffalo by-election in '92. All new members had the experience in the general election of June 15, 1993. I think that nobody in this Chamber can today say that they don't recognize the degree to which Albertans are concerned about MLA compensation.

It may well be that there will still be frustration, and Albertans may still be angry at the end of the day, but I absolutely disagree with the Member for Calgary-Glenmore who said, when this matter was last before us, that it doesn't matter whether it's an independent commission or just a group of MLAs sitting around making the decision. I vigorously dispute that assertion. Mr. Speaker, it makes a world of difference. It doesn't mean that everybody is going to rhapsodize or be tremendously warm and positive when they see the recommendations of an independent commission, but I think it invests whatever the recommendations are with a whole lot more credibility than the Members' Services Committee can at this point. I think there is a need to do a much better job in terms of MLA compensation. I think it's important to attempt to harmonize the various kinds of compensation we get.

I don't suggest that this is an easy job. It's not. I don't think the question is one of whether we feel that we're worth more or we're worth less. Each of us has taken this job voluntarily, to the best of my knowledge. I haven't heard anybody claim they were coerced to run. What that means is that when we took the job we agreed we were going to live to a large extent with the perceptions, because in this business the perception is very much the reality. I think that any member who's uncomfortable with that notion – it's not good enough that we feel that the level of compensation is fair. If it's not seen as being fair by the people we represent, then we're in the wrong business. We have to understand that it's that perception that counts for everything. It's that perception that gives us credibility. It's that perception which allows us to provide leadership in the provincial community.

So with those comments I just say that what's at stake when we deal with MLA compensation is our credibility, individually and collectively. I think Albertans have given us that message as clearly, as emphatically as any electorate ever can. The real challenge now is whether we respond to it or whether we continue to allow a Members' Services Committee to tinker away, occasionally commission a survey, a study and say, "Well, folks, we've addressed this whole business." It isn't good enough. There are a lot of members in this Assembly that have raised concerns about the Young Offenders Act, or they've raised concerns about gun control. You know, when they say those things, they say: "We're responding. We're responding to what we hear. We're giving a voice to angry Albertans." Well, I wish members in this Assembly would commit a fraction of the same degree of energy that they've invested in those issues, which we can't do very much about as a provincial jurisdiction anyway. I wish they'd commit the same kind of energy to reforming the way we're compensated, because that is also a concern to Albertans.

I encourage all members to support this Bill. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Point of Order Questioning a Member**

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

MR. DAY: I just wonder if the member opposite would entertain a question.

MR. DICKSON: I've concluded my remarks, Mr. Speaker. Thanks very much. He'll have an opportunity to speak now.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak briefly to this, and the reason I say briefly is because we think this is a valuable item to be looked at and discussed. Certainly members on this side would like to see the opportunity of a vote happen today, because I think the issues are quite clear.

I want to say right from the start that actually I agree with what this is asking for, Bill 214. I don't agree with the fact that we should have this particular Bill – and I'd like to speak to that – but I certainly agree with what it's asking for in terms of an independent assessment of MLA remuneration, everything MLAs receive. It's no secret; I've been quite public and spoken in the past in terms of my concerns regarding MLA remuneration, how that's established, the MLA pension plan before we axed it, the 30 percent so-called increase, et cetera. It is interesting to note, by the way, that with the elimination of the MLA pension plan, the compensation package for MLAs is now approximately 30 percent less than it was in '89, before that particular raise in 1989. So I have been very public about my concerns related to MLA compensation and how it's arrived at.

We need to be careful. I think it's worth looking at and giving some consideration to the fact that independent commissions or analyses have been done in the past. In 1979 Justice Tevie Miller was appointed, totally independent, a judge, as a matter of fact a Liberal judge, to use whatever means at his disposal were required to do a full assessment.

#### **Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers**

MR. DICKSON: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo rising on a point of order.

MR. DICKSON: I'm concerned only with the reference to a "Liberal judge," Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the hon. minister would withdraw that reference for the obvious reason.

MR. DAY: I assume that the member opposite feels that it's offensive to be referred to as a Liberal. If that's the case, I withdraw it. I didn't realize he would be offended by that.

MR. SPEAKER: It would be best parliamentary practice, the Chair believes – if a member wanted to give any sort of political tinge to the judiciary, it probably could be a person appointed by a former Liberal administration. That would probably be more appropriate, because we all know that Conservative administrations appoint people who have previously been associated with the Liberal Party or the New Democratic Party. The Liberal administrations have done the same thing by appointing people who had previously been associated with other parties than Liberal. To be perfectly factual, it would be the colour of the administration that made the appointment.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly I'd withdraw any inference whatsoever that there was any kind of prejudice in Mr. Justice Tevie Miller's duties that would be in any way

prejudiced or tainted by his particular political persuasion. That was not the intent of the remark whatsoever. As a matter of fact, he's known and has a reputation for being a very even-minded person and being able to look at an issue and judge it on its merits. That is why, one of the reasons I believe, he was selected in 1979 to do this very review.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DAY: In doing that review, the bottom line was that he looked at everything MLAs do and what they're responsible for and in 1979 recommended, I believe, the equivalent of a 50 percent increase – a 50 percent increase – in the remuneration package for MLAs. Now, I'm not surprised that he made that recommendation, because when you look at the time alone, just the straight hours that an MLA puts in – 60 to 80 to 90 hours a week while we're in session, four or five months a year, and anywhere from 50 to 75 to 80 hours a week when we're not in session is standard fare for an MLA. MLAs don't complain about that. They don't whine about that. So I'm not surprised, among all the other responsibilities and things an MLA has to handle, notwithstanding the sheer hours every week, that there was a 50 percent recommendation. The Legislature of the day obviously did not see fit to go ahead with the recommended 50 percent increase in compensation for MLAs, but it's interesting that that's what a very even-minded judge came up with after his full analysis.

#### 3:10

I make reference to the Peat Marwick Stevenson & Kellogg management consulting firm who were hired in 1992 to assess, again totally independently – there were no MLAs sitting on that consulting firm team – to do an analysis of everything MLAs and ministers do and are responsible for: cover it all. As a matter of fact, I believe when you look at the interviews that took place with some 32 MLAs, everything that you see here in the Bill, especially those things under section 3(1) and in other areas, everything that was covered in the Bill was covered by in-depth analysis and comparison: comparison with other jurisdictions on the political side, comparison with the private sector, and comparison with the public sector.

The analysis – again, this is a totally independent body, which is what the member opposite is asking for, that released that study on March 24, 1993 – found that MLAs were somewhat equal to elected officials in other jurisdictions; however, they were paid lower than both their public- and private-sector counterparts. So the independent group doing the analysis then came up with – and you've seen the charts and the in-depth comparative measuring sticks that are used in all aspects of job comparison. To do this they used commonly accepted private-sector business instruments to do the determination and to do the comparisons. Here they say: well, our feeling is that MLAs are paid lower than in a similar situation in the public and private sectors. When the noncash compensation components were taken into account, expense values were found reasonable, expenses were found reasonable, and health and other related benefits were comparable to both the public and private sectors. That was the analysis of that particular report, which was a fairly extensive one.

I'm glad the government and the administration of the day did not say: "Oh, great. We've found that as MLAs we're paid lower than our public- and private-sector counterparts, so let's raise our compensation." I'm glad the Legislature didn't do that. Not that that wouldn't have been deserving in comparison and workload – I think it would have been – but it would have been a very difficult thing, obviously, for the public to understand that.

Also, we are moving into a mode of asking for voluntary restraint and in fact rollbacks from our own public-sector workers, so MLAs set the tone by taking a voluntary 5 percent reduction themselves.

Then of course the boldest move that has ever been seen, frankly, not just in Canada but in North America in terms of the pension package: eliminating the pension plan retroactively to 1989. I was somewhat pleased to see the government of Prince Edward Island just recently in doing a review of their pension package saying: we should do as the Alberta government did and eliminate our pension plan. So it seems that we may have other MLAs across the country commiserating in misery with us.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what happened with that independent commission was that though it indicated MLAs were being paid lower than their public- and private-sector counterparts, in fact there was no move to raise things. There was a substantial reduction when you take the 5 percent. You look at all the expenses that were analyzed in depth and in detail and found to be reasonable, but since then there have also been reductions there and in the pension plan. We now have a compensation package 30 percent less than previous to 1989. So there's been significant reduction going on.

That brings us to the question of: why do we do this again? Is that the best use of taxpayer dollars? That last one, the Peat Marwick study, came to a cost of some \$125,000 – \$125,000 to do that study.

The studies, then, that have been independently done have shown that we are lower paid than public- and private-sector counterparts, and in fact we have one situation where a recommendation by a judge was 50 percent higher.

Now, I'm also pleased to report – and it's been reported; I don't know how widely – that the Premier himself is in support of having some sort of an independent review, and let's do that. We are in a mode of saying: why do we want increased legislation in every area of our life? We can move to do this without legislation. The move can happen without legislation, and that can be dealt with. Also, the whole direction of that can be looked at by Members' Services in terms of making sure it's independent, that there's no MLA sitting on it. As a matter of fact, a lot of people don't realize that when the Members' Services Committee meets, everything that is said there is recorded in *Hansard*. The media are invited. When it meets in the Chamber, in fact the public is invited to those particular meetings. Whether people find it boring or interesting or not, it is fully and readily available for all Albertans to see when their representatives talk about increases or talk about decreases. That's the type of approach that needs to happen.

I believe – and I'm speaking not cynically here – the member opposite is sincere in wanting to see this happen. The reason I say that somewhat hesitantly is that when you look at private members' Bills, you do see that a lot of the private members' Bills are asking for things that have already been done. Sometimes – I'm not saying this is happening here – that could be used then. A member on this side of the House could see a private member's Bill that's asking for something, could realize it's already happening, and vote against the Bill but still be supporting in principle what it's asking for. Then do you know what happens? I'm not saying that the member opposite would do this, but what less honourable people would do is then publish a little paper and say that government members voted against having their salaries looked at. That's what happens sometimes. Bills are sometimes designed for that very purpose. There's no way we can support the Bill, but we support it in principle.

I'm not suggesting the member opposite is doing that. I've said to the member that I take her at face value that she's sincere in wanting to see this happen. But already we know it's happening. Already we know it's happening that our members are being pictured as voting against certain Bills, the reasons not being stated, and it's a very shallow way of trying to show that somebody is for or against something. I don't believe the member opposite is planning to do that, and I'm looking forward to working with her and the other members of her party to see this achieved, to see it achieved that there would be an independent assessment. Another one. We just had one, but let's do another one.

Let's not belabour ourselves with excessive legislation that then has to be appealed or repealed or amended every time you want to change it. Let's do it with a broad brush. Let's look at everything, and let's do it in an independent way but not in a narrow way as would be required through the legislative process here.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak a few words in favour of Bill 214. Now, we look at Bill 214 and what it advocates. It advocates something that is very, very similar to what many Members of the Legislative Assembly had proposed. To the last member that spoke: yes, he was one of those. I believe, if I recall history correctly, there were only two members on the Members' Services Committee that voted very, very firmly no, no, no to the 30 percent increase. If I recall correctly, I was one member and the other was the Member for Red Deer-North. Am I not correct? Yes. So certainly I can take that member's words that he is saying in good faith because he has proven his actions in the past by voting no for the 30 percent increase.

I've always held myself as an elected representative when it came to this whole issue of remuneration, as to what's appropriate and what's not, that there are two different methods, I guess, of doing it. We've seen various governments try different approaches. One is something that was tried with city council a number of times, and that is to do it in a very rational or very reasonable, responsible manner. In other words, come up with some type of mechanism that may tie it in to the cost of living, may tie it in to the average union settlement, whatever, but something that every year automatically kicks in to bring it in line and keep it in line with what's happening in the private sector. In those types of instances there is no public outcry. There's only a public outcry when there's irresponsible behaviour. You don't see the public get all uptight because a bunch of elected representatives are acting very reasonable, acting very responsibly.

3:20

If I go back to 1989, if Members' Services then would have voted themselves, let's say, a 5 percent increase rather than a 30 percent increase, I don't think there would have been any outcry, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I think the public probably would have said, "Now, there is a responsible bunch of Members of the Legislative Assembly that know how to behave in the public interest." They probably would have pointed their fingers at the then Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and the Member for Red Deer-North saying, "Now, those are two Members of the Legislative Assembly that set the proper example by voting no to the 30 percent increase."

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, there are instances where, obviously, to give that responsibility to the elected representatives themselves simply does not hold. It simply is not carried out in such a

method that it engenders the public's faith or the public's interest. Normally one would assume that elected representatives could behave in a responsible enough fashion that there wouldn't be that need to look at other areas, that the elected body would say: "Okay; we're asking the public sector to take a 5 percent decrease. Maybe the cabinet ministers should take a 10 percent decrease." And so on and so forth. That hasn't happened in the five years that I've been here.

Right off the bat the 30 percent increase is something that one would not have visualized becoming reality when one became a Member of the Legislative Assembly, even though at that time I can recall some of the arguments being made that there had not been an increase for several years so it was justified. Initially even I myself assumed that we could collectively act in a very responsible fashion. I can recall making a statement. I questioned the need for an independent commission at that particular time, Mr. Speaker. Then when I looked afterwards at what happened, a 30 percent increase – we saw the questionable drawing of subsistence allowance, for example, where some members had to apologize to the public. They had to put a stop to it. Things changed. It became quite obvious that there was some question in the public's mind as to whether this body was responsible enough to set their own remuneration. I think that became clear. It was in that whole process that I had to rethink my position. It became very, very clear that what I had thought at one time would no longer hold.

It wasn't only myself, Mr. Speaker. I can recall the Premier of the day, Premier Don Getty, making very similar statements saying: oh, yes, obviously I am now convinced that there is a need for an independent commission. If I recall correctly, he actually tabled a letter in this Legislative Assembly through the former Speaker advocating that such a commission be put in place. Now, it never did happen. A study got under way and so on and so forth. Then when the current Premier came along, again similar statements were made that, yes, there is the need for an independent commission and we will put the independent commission in place.

In fact, it went to Members' Services to the extent that we sat there as members saying that we would appoint somebody from the judicial system, somebody from the labour movement, somebody from the business community, from the university, and so on and so forth. I can recall the former Member for Grande Prairie making amendments saying that it was stacked too heavily in favour of the labour movement and not enough executives on there. So we fine-tuned it all. The former Member for Edmonton-Highlands played a significant role in that process as well. We had the body named. We thought at that point that it was gung ho. Then suddenly there was a change from the point of view of the members on the government side. They said: we're going to table that until we do this Peat Marwick study, \$125,000, \$150,000, whatever. Peat Marwick certainly did the work that they were paid for; no question about that.

Mr. Speaker, what happened is that that report was tabled, and there was an expectation that we would follow through and we would name that independent commission at that particular point. But the election came along; the pensions were struck, except for those that were getting away with the big fat pensions that are out there probably living a relatively good life right now. They escaped these changes that occurred. Somehow that deflected things for at least a period of time. Suddenly nobody was talking anymore about the need for an independent commission because some people felt satisfied because we no longer had the pension. That was going to be the end of things.

Unfortunately, it doesn't end there, because somewhere along the line somebody has to be able to say: "Those MLAs should not get this; they should get that. They should get more here, less here. They should possibly not get one-third tax free; possibly something else isn't high enough." Who knows what? In other words, if you continue where it is today and you go on year after year after year after year with no changes and if the cost of living goes down, down, down, then obviously the remuneration isn't reflecting what's happening out there. The other way, of course, is not reflective, and it's got to be reflective of what's happening in the real world, what's happening out there in the private sector. So there has to be a mechanism. Because there is no longer faith in this particular body to do it themselves or to have that authority delegated to the Members' Services Committee, who in themselves are representative of this particular House, then the only option is to go to the outside, look at persons from appropriate fields.

When we look at this, what makes this Bill so good: when we talk in terms of the commission, it doesn't only propose a commission, but it actually spells out how that commission would be put into place, how it would geographically spread itself throughout the province, how it would satisfy the interests of various groups from a professional point of view.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, in view of the time, I'm going to move – do you want it adjourned? – that the question now be put.

MR. SPEAKER: Is there agreement with the motion by the hon. member?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed?

All those in favour of Bill 214, Members of the Legislative Assembly Remuneration Review Commission Act, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Ady	Forsyth	McFarland
Amery	Gordon	Mirosh

Black	Haley	Oberg
Brassard	Hierath	Paszowski
Burgener	Jacques	Pham
Calahasen	Jonson	Renner
Clegg	Kowalski	Smith
Coutts	Laing	Sohal
Day	Langevin	Stelmach
Dinning	Lund	Thurber
Doerksen	Magnus	Trynchy
Dunford	Mar	Woloshyn
Fischer	McClellan	

Totals: For – 25 Against – 38

[Motion lost]

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

**3:40 Tracking Former Social Assistance Clients**

516. Moved by Mr. Sekulic:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a comprehensive tracking system of former social assistance clients to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of social assistance programs.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] It's all right; it's all right. I appreciate the warm welcome. Thank you.

It's a pleasure to stand this afternoon and to speak to Motion 516. Motion 516 addresses an issue which is about Albertans, about their government, an issue which is within the mandate of the provincial government and therefore most appropriate for debate in this Assembly. It is an issue that we as legislators can do something about. The debate of this issue, however, should not focus on whether it should occur but rather should focus on how it can best be implemented. The issue, quite simply, is one of accountability. It is, as the motion reads, a request of the government

to establish a comprehensive tracking system of former social assistance clients to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of social assistance programs.

Now, I would expect the government to defend its lack of such monitoring in one of two ways: either denying that there is a problem and saying that the status quo is acceptable or admitting that there is no tracking and that it would be an invasion of privacy to attempt to track former clients of social assistance. I intend to address both of these perceptions in arguing the need for this motion to be carried unanimously by this Assembly.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Let me start by referring to the 1992-93 annual report of the Auditor General. His audit coverage, observations, and recommendations are a key supplement to my motion. It is also important to observe the Auditor General's opening comments in which he qualifies his assessment of the Department of Family and Social Services' operations by stating that

these recommendations are founded in the belief that identifying and costing the services that Departments provide is key to effective financial decision-making.

So why is the status quo not acceptable? Once again it is appropriate to read the Auditor General's comments. In referring

to the supports for independence program, the Auditor General states:

The Department does not know why its clients stop applying for public assistance, or whether its efforts to help them find employment are succeeding.

In large part the department administers transitional programs insofar that the programs are the last resort once all other resources have been exhausted. Given that the programs are a last resort, they must be strictly accounted for. The absence of accountability has severe financial and human costs. It is no longer good enough for the minister to rise in his place and state: Mr. Speaker, my department spends this much on this program and this much on that program, and we deal with a total of this many people, and we have closed this many files. The government needs to state expenditures, outcomes, and most importantly, must clearly link what part the stated level of expenditures had in delivering the stated outcomes. This motion requests that the government track outcomes and make the necessary link of those outcomes to the moneys expended to derive them. The causal effect between expenditures and outcomes speaks not to how many dollars are allocated to a department or a specific program but rather how effective each dollar expended is or was.

The outcome must justify the expenditure, and if it doesn't, we must look at other approaches that will deliver the desired outcome. It is much like arguing about the way you spend money or the way you save money. One always implies the other. Likewise, the argument becomes whether to allocate moneys to a specific program and then work within that parameter or set a desired outcome, implement the necessary programs, and then realize the savings through successful program and service delivery. This, the latter, is what government should be doing, not offering taxpayers less programs and services for the same or greater amounts of taxes.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this spring the Assembly voted on the budgets of each of the departments and in fact on the entire cost of operating government for the upcoming fiscal year. I must admit that as a new member of the Legislature I had a great deal of difficulty voting on the budgets. The reason for my difficulty was not as the Provincial Treasurer remarked at that time, saying across the floor that the opposition wanted to close down certain programs or services. That was far from the case. Rather, it was difficult for me as an opposition member to permit the government to continue to spend taxpayers' dollars without any indication of previous effectiveness of similar expenditures. In fact, I did not vote in favour of the department's budget because of the potential to misdirect or use funds without an acceptable level of effectiveness or efficiency.

The votes on the budget for the Department of Family and Social Services in particular were a continuation of the status quo excepting that they are now operating on a significantly reduced budget. The issue of eliminating need has been set aside so that the government can simply assist fewer people. The government's direction is to simply acknowledge fewer people in need. In place of setting a program goal, a goal of helping as a last resort all Albertans in need to make a successful transition into independence where possible, the government is setting a budget and then closing files until it reaches a total case level which is within the budget. In doing so, the government effectively abdicates one of its primary responsibilities as a government and that is to its most vulnerable citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition and in fact all Albertans need to know and have a right to know not only how much a program costs but also how successful the program is. We need to know

how many files have been closed and for what reasons. Is it successful intervention or is it simply policy that is driving the closure of files? I suspect some of the reasons for file closures include that a person didn't qualify at the time of application and the department later discovered pertinent information and closed the file. Perhaps the person moved out of the province. Perhaps the person found employment. Perhaps the person went for training or upgrading. Whatever the reason – and there could be many more than those I've suggested – they all need to be known. Essentially we need to know that government involvement in controlling the total provincial demand for social assistance.

Because we are discussing and voting on billions of taxpayers' dollars, the government must do more than speculate as to the reasons for file closures. In fact, the Auditor General clearly indicated exactly that. He states, "At present, the Department can only speculate on the reasons for the significant number of file closures." The status quo is simply not acceptable any longer. It is the government which must be made more accountable for its initiatives and the results which follow from those initiatives.

What about clients' privacy, Mr. Speaker? After all, once an individual is no longer on assistance, they may be difficult to track or for that matter may not wish to be contacted by the department. In fact, I believe this is an issue which may warrant further debate in the House. However, it is important to note that the government currently contracts, as the minister often tells the Assembly, with hundreds of agencies and organizations. In many of the contracts that the government tenders, it stipulates the requirement for outcome measures: three- and six-month follow-ups to ensure that the services of the agencies or organizations were effective. I am with my motion simply requesting that the government apply the same criteria to itself. After all, the agencies or organizations are accountable to the government, and the government in turn is accountable to the taxpayer and to those very people in receipt of social assistance to ensure that government intervention, be it direct or through a contracted service, be efficiently delivered and produce effective results.

For some unknown reason the government has demanded accountability of those it contracts with but has neglected to apply the same standard to itself: being accountable to Albertans. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that this government continues to speculate as to where former clients may or may not be and what did or didn't work in terms of intervention. They have called this success. I would say that Albertans have a reason to doubt the validity of the government's claim of success in assisting Alberta's needy. The burden of proof here lies in this case with the government. Unfortunately, they can neither prove nor disprove their claim of success. The only evidence of government failure will materialize in the hardships imposed on those who are most vulnerable and least able to put their concerns forward. This, I suspect, will change as the severity of the hardships is intensified over time.

### 3:50

Mr. Speaker, my motion proposes a comprehensive tracking system, a system which, if implemented, would provide a great deal of insight into the plight of the disadvantaged who, as a last resort, approach government for assistance. The system could illustrate and validate successful interventions, which in turn could be utilized to successfully reduce caseloads. The benefits of the system are solidly rooted both fiscally and socially, and in fact I refer to the business plans, A Better Way, that were released earlier this year where a number of the program outcomes that we're looking at really don't address the issue of accountability.



We look at the number of months on social assistance, welfare caseloads per capita. These are somewhat removed and somewhat distant from the real issue here, which should include the natural attrition of files on social assistance, the reopens of files provincially, and the number of reopens per capita. This would lend itself a little better to understanding the dynamics of the system.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to *Alberta Hansard*, May 26, 1994, where the Minister of Family and Social Services stated that the worst thing we can do for people is create dependency. I agree wholeheartedly with those comments. My argument is that by not measuring the outcomes and the respective causes, the government may in fact be doing what the minister deemed as the worst thing they could do. I encourage all members to vote against doing the worst thing and instead support Motion 516, the motion about accountability for provincial finances and for those Albertans amongst us who are in need of our assistance.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close and permit a colleague to stand, as I see the Treasurer is anxious.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I've been galvanized. I've been galvanized to stand and speak and say how much I admire the member for bringing forward this kind of motion. It is a motion worthy of debate, and were it to be broader in its focus, were it to be truly more comprehensive in the range of desirable outcomes that need to be measured and focused upon, I would want to recommend to the members of the Assembly that there be unanimous support for this motion. I'm not able to, but let me come to that later on in my remarks, although I know you will want me to be brief.

The genesis of this motion – and I know it's what captured the member's attention – was the May 6, 1993, budget. It was a budget that spelled out very clearly to Albertans the kind of approach that this government was going to take in managing its financial affairs. I go back to page 127 of that May 6, 1993, budget where the papers in the budget made it clear and said this:

To make the plan a reality, government must rethink both what it does and the way it works. Government needs to become:

- clear about what its business is,
- focused on program results and service quality,
- more imaginative and creative in its approach to problem solving,
- more focused on preventing problems than on fixing them,
- more co-operative in our partnerships with other levels of government,
- focused on results-based budgeting and value-for-money expenditure management, and
- more open and accountable to the people of Alberta, informing and involving them in the work of government.

I think the hon. member wanted to today, but he couldn't take that next extra important step to acknowledge that that is exactly what this government has begun to do, unlike virtually any other government, Liberal or otherwise, in the dominion of Canada today.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is an exciting time, and I know the hon. member would acknowledge this as well. It is an exciting time to be involved in the public service and to serve in this Chamber and to be able to focus on the kinds of steps we have begun to take in the business planning process that began this time last year and resulted in a major initiative that paralleled the budgetary track with the release on February 24 of *A Better Way: A Plan for Securing Alberta's Future*.

I'm reminded of budget day when one of my colleagues confronted . . . The Member for Calgary-Varsity, if I'm not mistaken – although he's made a mistake in his chair – was visited

by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud turned to one of these documents and said: you know, this is a terrible business plan; it doesn't do what it's supposed to do. Now, the Member for Calgary-Varsity is always quick on his feet, always, Mr. Speaker. What did he say? He said: you're right, Mikey, but it's better than last year's.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, we'd never done this before. No other government in this country has taken the steps that we have, that this government has in putting this kind of business plan together that focuses on what our business is, what our core mission is. I refer to the core mission statement of the Department of Family and Social Services, page 12 of their business plan:

The Department Mission: To Keep Families Responsible and Accountable, Adults Independent and Children Safe.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there couldn't be anything shorter or sweeter or more succinct and to the point than that.

The hon. member acknowledged that it was a beginning. He said we fell short. Yes, I'd say we have yet to and we are a long ways from achieving perfection, Mr. Speaker. But I know he wants to contribute. He's that kind of an honourable gentleman. He wants to contribute to making sure that these outcome measures, program outputs, efficiency measures, and social policy outcomes, will be made even better next year.

The reason I have trouble, Mr. Speaker, focusing just on the narrowness of his measurement is that he calls for a comprehensive tracking system of former social assistance clients. Well, as much as those former clients have an obligation to fellow taxpayers and fellow Albertans for supporting them in their time of need, the best thing they can say to their fellow taxpayers who contributed to their temporary plight is, "Thank you, and now I'm on with the rest of my life and earning an income and contributing back to society." While I appreciate there is a need to focus on "Does it work?" – Does this program work? Do these measures work? Are there better ways to do it? – I'm unable to be convinced by an effort on the hon. member's part . . .

#### Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. SEKULIC: A point of order.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Provincial Treasurer, we have a point of order.

MR. SEKULIC: Would the hon. Treasurer entertain a question?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, in the interest of openness and sharing and honesty and transparency and a willingness to be a partner, I'm tempted to say no, but I'll say yes.

#### Debate Continued

MR. SEKULIC: I appreciate the preamble, hon. Treasurer. I wonder if you could expand on your explanation here that former clients would not like to or would not desire to be contacted after they're no longer on assistance, yet you have these measures in place for agencies with whom you contract as a government where you do expect those agencies to do three- and six-month follow-ups. So if you could just elaborate slightly on that, I would appreciate that.

Thank you.

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a helpful suggestion. I was unaware of that, and it's something that I would want to go back and study further.

Mr. Speaker, my concern is the narrowness of this in that it doesn't cover a sufficient range of matters that need to be measured. The hon. member did talk about:

- Number of months on social assistance
- Welfare caseload per capita
- Percentage of children receiving Child Welfare services in-home (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal)
- Average months that a child welfare file is open
- Child Welfare caseload per capita
- Percentage of developmentally-disabled persons who are living in the community by their own choice, with adequate support
- Percentage of disabled persons with income equal to or greater than the AISH maximum.

Page 12 of the Family and Social Services business plan in the A Better Way document tabled in the Assembly February 24, 1994, at approximately 4:07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct in his objective. Here we spend this year and this Assembly has approved some \$740 million. Almost three-quarters of a billion of taxpayers' dollars has been committed to income support to individuals and families and specifically here to the supports for independence program.

4:00

MR. FISCHER: How many dollars?

MR. DINNING: I know the hon. Member for Wainwright is dazzled. I know he's amazed. His constituents need to know, and so for his benefit and their benefit I will repeat: this provincial government with only the support of Alberta taxpayers is spending nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars this year, Mr. Speaker, on the supports for independence program, another \$182 million on income benefits, for a total of just a little less than \$930 million of taxpayers' dollars. It is a significant amount of money.

Both sides of this House want to make sure that those taxpayers' dollars are invested and are spent wisely with the purpose of ensuring that the department's outcome, the department's mission is accomplished: "To Keep Families Responsible and Accountable, Adults Independent and Children Safe." It's a first step, Mr. Speaker, the business plan that was spelled out in February. The Minister of Family and Social Services is, as we speak, finding and seeking better ways to make sure that next year's business plan will produce and elaborate and be more specific about the kinds of measurable results that we want to achieve. The Department of Family and Social Services is working on that right now.

There could come a day, Mr. Speaker, not just in social services but throughout the government, whether it's the Treasury Department or the Labour department or maybe even the agriculture department and most definitely the Advanced Education and Career Development department, where we will link funding to measurable results. Where those institutions exceed and do far better than expected outcomes, maybe they ought to receive a bonus, such that those who don't and fall short for specific, measurable reasons – maybe there should be an incentive for them to earn back what might have been lost in any given year.

Mr. Speaker, that is the way that the market system works. We on this side of the House believe strongly that there are opportunities that the market system and the marketplace offer for these kinds of programs to ensure that the funding is focused on measurable outcomes that improve the lives of Albertans. Clearly, that would be the objective here in the Department of Family and Social Services.

I would encourage the hon. member at the first available opportunity to bring back a more comprehensive kind of approach to measurement and perhaps not this narrow performance

indicator that would come just from the tracking system. So while I encourage the hon. member and would happily work with him perhaps on finding those broader measurements, I am unable, Mr. Speaker, to support this specific motion at this time.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is encouraging to know from the Treasurer all the plans that the department has, although we have not been able to get the same amount of enthusiasm from the minister in response to any of our questions. So I trust that we can keep this issue on the table, keep it visible, and watch for some concrete results.

The Alberta Liberals have been calling for a tracking system for ex-recipients since first elected in the Assembly. We claim that without such a system in place there is no way to determine whether or not we are getting value for the money spent on social assistance programs, particularly the employment training and job readiness courses.

The budget for Family and Social Services, as has been pointed out by the hon. Treasurer, is one of the top three expenditures in the provincial government. Spending on social assistance for '94-95 is \$740 million. It's simply incomprehensible that given the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on department computer systems, the government is unable to keep track of people affected by their programs. It's always been my understanding that human services, which are the primary government activity, are designed and carried out to ensure the well-being of the people of Alberta.

Of the three big departments Health develops standards and monitors the results and uses those results for the basis of future programs. Education does the same. The Department of Family and Social Services demands accountability and outcomes confirmation from funded agencies. So the department obviously recognizes that if the money it spends and the programs it puts in place do not result in a reasonable standard of living for all citizens of this province and more independence and self-reliance, then the department has fallen short of its mandate.

Despite the cuts and forced file closures, funding for social services continues to eat up a big part of our budget. While we would argue about the direction the cuts are taking and the speed, admittedly there is still a tremendous amount of tax dollars dedicated to social assistance with no means to measure its effectiveness. To date, the department has closed over 30,000 files representing 63,000 Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I quote from September 15, 1993, *Hansard*, page 263, when the Member for Edmonton-Manning asked, from the files closed,

how many [people] are working full-time . . . how many are enrolled in a training/education program, how many have left the province, and how many . . . whose status is unknown?

Now, particularly in the education programs that certainly would not be a difficult thing to follow. Because we pay for those programs, we must know where the people are and what programs they're in. Such information is crucial to understanding not only why people are turning to social assistance but, more importantly, why they are leaving. Is it because they found full-time employment, which would be great? But we need to know: were the training programs helpful? How many people have reapplied for assistance from another district office or a new locale somewhere else in the province? According to the Auditor General we don't keep track of that. Perhaps the individual left the province. Did he find work, or did he go on assistance in another province? We suspect that a large portion of these individuals have simply

dropped off, living a subsistence existence, and many of them may be homeless. Without an understanding of where people are going, the department will continue on blindly funding the same kinds of programs they have been doing in the past 20 years, with little regard or understanding of the impact or effectiveness.

Fuelling this issue is the glaring discrepancy between the government's definition of success and our own. The Klein government considers every closed file a measure of success, assuming that the individual or family is now living a blissful existence in full-time employment. But the Premier and the minister – their approach appears based on that old out of sight, out of mind philosophy. As long as someone has been kicked off assistance, they don't really care what they are doing or how they're living. Success is not a closed file. Success is functioning families, children in school, food on the table, decent housing, and the hope of a job for the future. Yet without ways of tracking to verify that jobs have been found, the province has very little evidence to even suggest that the ex-client now is living independently of government or community support. I submit that the government is going to increase its efforts at accountability, tracking and finding out the results of their own programs. It's best not to wait too long because there are a lot of people out there who are running in circles and also many, I believe, who have gone back on assistance after the training programs.

We acknowledge that tracking and gathering information requires a commitment of dollars and staff resources, but given today's advanced computer age, gathering information on closed files should be a simple task. The department already attempts to document the reasons each file is closed. Making this a mandatory requirement would be an important first step in the tracking system, and we see no evidence of a first step.

We also have received information that the department has kept no record of the approximately 10,000 people transferred from supports for independence to the Students Finance Board. Now, that is really almost unbelievable.

#### 4:10

MR. CARDINAL: There are 11,000, and they're all going to school.

MS HANSON: Yes, but what happens . . . I guess I can't lapse into question period.

Our concern is: how many of the people who've taken the courses, many of whom call my office every week, are either looking for work . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MS HANSON: I'll count them and send you the number. I can get them easily every week.

AN HON. MEMBER: Every week?

MS HANSON: Yes.

. . . are either still looking for work or are going back onto assistance? Because many of those programs are pretty shallow.

I would hope that the department will become serious, as the Treasurer suggested, that we do start to see some results quickly, not in several years' time. But in order to reinforce that direction, I would request that everyone vote in favour of Motion 516.

Thank you.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to compliment my colleagues for bringing forward this motion and some of the very thoughtful debate. I think what we're hearing is a very sincere concern that as we deal with the deficit, which is a social problem and a concern for everyone in this province, we do not disadvantage some and make it harder for them.

However, I have some concerns about developing a comprehensive tracking system. Notwithstanding, I believe, the phenomenal cost to do so, I would suggest that the hon. member consider, quite simply, that if indeed tracking is important, the clients who contact social services or who are in need of government in order to access any support have to agree to track themselves. I would say to you as a suggestion that rather than encumber government with a major need to follow thousands and thousands of clients coming and going, quite simply, we make it a condition of support from this government. Therefore, in that spirit of self-initiative, if you need to access social services, then it's conditional that you continue to keep track of yourself on our behalf.

This government has taken a very bold step in reforming some of the serious social safety net issues that have been before us, and I find it interesting that the question in my mind is: what is the purpose of the tracking? I hear quite clearly the concern of accountability, and I respect that, but I also hear the very serious comment that there's no confidence from the Liberal opposition that there are people who have successfully made it off the welfare rolls and are independent and are on their own. Is the concern that they've just gone somewhere else or that they've just fallen through the cracks? So I'm trying to assess: what is the real purpose of the tracking? Is it so that we have good statistical information? Because that doesn't seem to be a clear comment that I'm hearing. I raise it because, you know, a number of seniors continue to move across borders as programs change, and we don't have any interest or comment or suggestion that we track them. We leave them completely free to access programs as they need to, and there's not a concern about seniors. So I'm just questioning what the purpose of the actual tracking is.

There are a number of statistics that could be developed from the tracking process, but I am concerned that they might be misleading. In fact, some of the successes we're seeing could lead government to think that some of these programs are no longer necessary, and as we are into a very new model of social assistance, I would just caution that tracking in the near and immediate future may not give us an accurate picture of the long-term needs of our social programs.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that the extent of tracking could to some degree provide the department with an excellent source of clientele data. However, it could be somewhat unthinkable for members of this House to believe the tracking system could actually work in practice. The reason is that as clients become self-sufficient and remove themselves from the welfare rolls, many may feel they no longer have an obligation to continue reporting their activities to the government. I have a concern that those who are on social assistance, perhaps through no fault of their own, would be quite happy to shake the dust off their heels, and the fact that government is going to be constantly watching them and holding them up as, "Were you a successful user of our system?" may be a problem for them.

From a practical perspective tracking clients could be very complex. People do move from one centre to the other, and they move not because they can get better welfare here or welfare there. They move for all sorts of reasons that affect families, that

affect employment opportunities, things as simple as women getting married and changing their names. The complexity of tracking could be quite onerous, and I think we have to look at what is a practical process involved here.

Mr. Speaker, depending on who you might ask, no one would know for certain what a comprehensive tracking system would actually entail or what sort of data it would solicit. This might leave many Albertans with the impression that the Alberta government has actually assumed the role of Big Brother, and as such, many ex-clients may be reluctant to reveal more information about themselves. As people move from one province to the other, how could the Department of Family and Social Services be able to keep track of them? I ask if this is the best use of resources. We have scarce financial resources to give those in need, and a cumbersome tracking process of those who have successfully left the system – I would suggest those resources are best kept in the hands of those who need them.

You know, quite clearly in identifying those who are off social assistance, what you are actually doing is focusing in a way on those who are left on. I know that's not the intention of the hon. member, but I do ask you to consider what you've done. You're saying: "How many of you got off? What is the secret of your success? Where are you now?" It only continues to point back to those who are disadvantaged and unable to perhaps improve their own situation.

We already maintain extensive records. I recognize what the member is suggesting, that we have to have an accountability process. But what would be a successful record of somebody who was on social assistance? I would suggest to you that occupational records, personal income, place of residence – things that come through from Revenue Canada. We are going to have national statistics. I don't need to remind people in the House here that a number of Canadians dodge the tax man each year, and that confirms to me the conclusion that people are suspicious of government institutions and activities and may see this as an unnecessary intrusion. We have difficulty even getting accurate census material because people are not willing to share some of the more personal details of their social life, their success, their income, their employment opportunities. We have a phenomenal underground economy. Some of the people who have made it off welfare may very well be comfortable working in the underground economy and have absolutely no interest in sharing some of those results with us no matter how successful they may be.

In the spring of last year the Minister of Family and Social Services announced major structural reforms which would overhaul the entire welfare system. The overall intent was to take the next step in moving from a passive to an increasingly active system which would emphasize the temporary intent of assistance, the priority of self-sufficiency and family responsibilities, and wider ranging training and employment opportunities for recipients. As benefits were restructured and reduced in July of last year to re-emphasize welfare as a program of last resort, at the same time new employment and training initiatives were put in place. It is important to recognize that in Advanced Education and Career Development our whole postsecondary restructuring has an employment component of accountability. I would suggest to you that we will be seeing very, very accurate and updated records of people who have successfully moved from dependence on social assistance into an education and training mode because the very institutions that want to attract these clients have to account for them.

4:20

In addition, we have struggled very hard with tracking dropouts. They're transients. They're changing from one school system to another, leaving grade 10, coming back in grade 11. We've had a hard time tracking the high school dropout. However, we now have a real commitment to maintain those accurate records, and I would suggest if we look at those who are on social assistance, many of them fall into the underskilled and undereducated. By pushing initiatives to get them into that system, we will be tracking them.

The fundamental goal of social assistance is to help those who truly cannot find meaningful employment. One of the groups of people who will be categorized in there are those who are severely disabled. It would be unfortunate. I just ask you to think through what you're suggesting. A disabled person who's on social assistance because of their inability to find meaningful employment – the need to track someone indicates that there's a constant reminder of their own inability to participate in society in a fully functional way. Unfortunately, what you do is focus on their disability and not on their ability. So I think that in looking at the tracking of the system, there would have to be some very, very specific ways to accept some members of this community who would be, by appropriate status, acquiring disability pensions or various funding opportunities that come through social assistance.

I would also suggest there are those who are not able to work perhaps because of linguistic or cultural situations. I would suggest that this would be a very, very serious intrusion into some of our multicultural practices and our ethnic realities in our communities in that what we're basically doing is that when people receive social assistance, maybe as new Canadians or perhaps because they haven't had a chance to learn English or French, and then move back into a more fiscally productive place in the community, we're having to target them. We're having to say: "Look what you've done. Where are you going?" That would be a real intrusion, because even for a number of our new Canadians, the fact that they have to be on any help or assistance is a major blow to their personal pride. I don't believe that having them sign on to a tracking system when they are more independent would enhance their ability to integrate into a Canadian life-style in an easy fashion.

The recent targets for social assistance programs as outlined in the three-year business plan I think reflect some of the sentiments I've addressed, that we want those who are in need to be able to access the programs but they are temporary assistance, that the need to become gainfully employed is your responsibility, and that we would help those who have, through no fault of their own, come upon a need for government assistance. These initiatives are currently in their early stages as the business plan unfolds. I think in a way, as I mentioned earlier, it may be a little premature to judge whether or not we've been fully successful.

Mr. Speaker, I would conclude my comments by reiterating I think a very positive sentiment in this particular motion. It asks the government to be accountable for the resources it puts to social assistance. It asks for those who receive social assistance to realize there is an end in sight and that as government would like to share their successes in a positive way. But I think it has to recognize that there are some fundamental flaws, not in the intent but in the practical aspect of it.

Mr. Speaker, I would also just like to conclude by making some reference to the concern I have for our native community. We are struggling through serious discussions on what would be appropriate assistance for native Canadians. This draws attention

at the federal level. It has interprovincial concerns. As we know, within the province itself there are very, very different aspects between different native communities and tribal agreements. They deal with them through supports through social services and other government departments.

Because of the overwhelming number of natives who have to access social assistance, I am concerned about the impact on their community as they are tracked and followed up on in this manner. Again, because of the educational opportunities and the real revisiting of some of their cultural expectations they are undertaking on their own, they may not be as quick to move from those in need to those who are independent. I am concerned that as some of those communities stay on the social assistance rolls longer than other elements in our community and other society members, we would perhaps, as we analyze and become accountable, turn around and have to focus hard, factual data on certain elements of our community who are not able to pick up and move through the need for social assistance as efficiently as some other new Canadians or parents who, while their children are young at home, are having to be out of the work force.

So again I just ask the member opposite to not view my lack of support for this motion as a criticism of the initiative. I think the whole value of having motions before the House is to explore how government does business and whether or not we should be retooling and rethinking how we provide things like social assistance to the community. It is a very, very positive statement about how we will integrate the accountability process into government activities. It tells Albertans that the dollars are going to be watched, and they're going to be watched seriously. For those reasons I feel that the hon. member has brought before us a serious issue for discussion. But, for myself, I see that there is a potential here to isolate and segregate certain members of our community who will perhaps be seen as being longtime users, and it may reflect poorly on them.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I believe it's close to closing debate, so I'll conclude my comments.

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

I hesitate to interrupt this part of the business to go on with other items of business, but the time for this motion has elapsed.

MS CALAHASEN: Shouldn't there be a vote? There has to be a vote.

PARLIAMENTARY COUNSEL: No.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, the time for debate on motion 516 has elapsed. We now go into government business. You heard the hon. Parliamentary Counsel.

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

**Bill 40**  
**Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 1994**

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, I believe we should have a motion for second reading on Bill 40 before we get anything to vote on.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I would move second reading of Bill 40, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 1994.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.  
All ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a second time]

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

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

4:30

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

**Bill 33**  
**Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 1994**

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All ready for the question?  
The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. During debate the other evening on Bill 33, the hon. member . . . [interjections]  
We are on Bill 33?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, we are on Bill 33. I know there's a little interruption, but just continue, hon. member.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* requested an amendment be presented, and since that hon. member is not here, I would like to make that amendment: that the amount involved be reviewed every five years. I put forward this amendment, and I apologize for not having it delivered earlier, but I had really expected that the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* would be here to do this. We had agreed that this would be presented, and I'm presenting it on his behalf. So if we could just take a moment, Mr. Chairman, while this is distributed.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Have you got that amendment ready?

Okay. We'll just take 30 seconds here to make sure it has gone through Parliamentary Counsel and we have that in order. In just 30 seconds we should be on the road.

MR. BRASSARD: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, the member is here now, and perhaps he'd like to speak to this directly. In his absence, I should just explain, I did bring forward an amendment that a review would be done for the amount of damages every five-year period and every five-year period thereafter. So if the member would like to speak to it and take a look at the . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hate this delay, but unfortunately we up here haven't got any amendment.

Hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, can you clarify something here?

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I had drafted an amendment and had discussed this with the Member for Olds-Didsbury. Last I heard, the amendment was with Mr. Work,

Parliamentary Counsel. I don't have the hard copy here. If in fact my friend from Olds-Didsbury has an amendment to achieve what he has just indicated and that's been approved by Parliamentary Counsel, then I'm happy to support that. That in fact addresses the very issue that I had raised in second reading on this Bill.

The hon. member indicated he has copies. I haven't seen the amendment, but if in fact it provides what the Alberta Law Reform Institute recommended, which was that there should be a review of the quantum of damages every five years, then that achieves what I thought was the single weakness in this Bill. It was the only recommendation from the Alberta Law Reform Institute which had not been carried forward, Mr. Chairman, into the Bill. When I spoke at second reading in terms of this amendment . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we have a choice here. We have no amendments in front of us. [interjection] Excuse me. Just bear with us. We have no amendments in front of us. We've got a section 9 and there is no section 9 in the Bill, so we have a problem. I haven't got a problem; it's just somebody else has got a problem.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, as discussed, we're happy to move to Bill 38 for consideration while this other matter is being attended to.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is that agreeable, that the House move to Bill 38? Then when we get this concern – we'll certainly get back to it right after 38.

### **Bill 38 Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. SMITH: There are some questions that were asked in the previous debate, Mr. Chairman, that I'd be pleased to answer in the full nature of completion of orderly legislation through this House. I'm more than pleased to step into the breach at this time and provide you with some very short and pointed comments that will allow us to get through this short hiatus of activity and to in fact recommend that Bill 38 proceed to third reading.

On some of the questions raised by Edmonton-Meadowlark, I'd just like to make a small correction in the information provided. With respect to the Legal Profession Act I indicated there are 232 lawyers who have taken advantage of section 127. In fact, there are 232 professional corporations. The majority of professional corporations involve only one practising lawyer, but there are some with two or more lawyers as shareholders. I want to assure the member and this Assembly that the repeal of section 127(3)(f) is not a get-the-lawyers exercise, as was unfortunately stated by other members in the House. We are simply exercising fairness amongst the professions.

**4:40**

It is correct, Mr. Chairman, that legislation permitting income splitting is current and was passed in '90, but – and who would know more than this House? – much has changed within the Alberta government since 1990. It's a new government with a progressive and dynamic leadership, with its eye on the future and not on the past. The financial analysis used was simply a hypothetical example, and we have never claimed that it reflected actual income of the lawyers. Incomes vary from year to year with the experience and expertise of the practitioners, the health of the economy, and of course many other factors. Our decision

reflected the need for a level playing field for all professionals that form professional corporations, not the hypothetical example.

The hon. member pointed out that some professions, such as pharmacists and optical dispensers, have the ability to split income with family members. Again, Mr. Chairman, that is only half the story. These professions are able to set up as business corporations and not professional corporations. Any Albertan can participate in the profit and accompanying risk from the practice of pharmacy, engineering, optical dispensing, or any of the professions mentioned by the member opposite, by investing in one of these business corporations. If you share the risk with these groups, you can share the rewards.

With the legal profession and others that incorporate with professional corporations, share ownership is restricted. In addition to the differences in the share structure, the nature of the pharmacy, optical dispensing, engineering, and other professions mentioned by the member is indeed different. Pharmacists and opticians sell products as well as professional services. They have inventory costs and other external costs that in fact the legal profession does not have. They need to finance an inventory. They have receivables. They have a different set of business parameters. Consulting engineers are often project managers, developers, and need huge capital investments to finance their projects. A business corporation structure is appropriate in these instances.

I want to move quickly to the questions raised by the member regarding the Dental Disciplines Act and the Health Disciplines Act. Our policy in the Dental Disciplines Act is that all matters which can affect people's rights or the public generally should be established in regulations. Bylaws are more related to the internal workings of the association. In the Health Disciplines Act we've deliberately left the wording open so that we can establish requirements for liability insurance on a case by case basis. The change is proposed so that we can deal with midwifery, but other circumstances may arise in the future.

I do not have any additional comments concerning the amendments to the other four statutes. I would like to take this point to recommend nothing and in fact, Mr. Chairman, call the question.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Right. Thank you. I'd like to thank the member for his comments in replying to some of the questions that we had when the Bill first came to second reading.

There is another issue that perhaps is not fully addressed by this particular piece of legislation but deals with the whole issue of passing legislation piece by piece as opposed to a whole. We saw some of that with regards to Bill 1. It would have made a lot more sense, perhaps, to in actual fact provide for a comprehensive Labour Relations Code that would amalgamate the provisions under the LRC and the Public Service Employee Relations Act.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MS LEIBOVICI: I'm still standing. Excuse me.

One of the things that has been brought to my attention with regards to this is that in terms of looking at the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, there's a committee within government that is looking at professional legislation, and that's the health work force rebalancing committee. It's my understanding that this committee is not moving full force ahead. Given the uncertainty

that we're seeing with the various professional groups as a result of the restructuring in education and health care and other sectors, this is a particular committee that would perhaps be well advised to ensure that it is continuing at full speed in order that professional legislation as a whole can be looked at.

In my comments in second reading I alerted the government to the major concern, and that was with regards to the Legal Profession Act. Again I'd like to thank the member for putting forward the answers to some of my questions that were brought up in second reading. I'd also like to put on record that I appreciated the member's forthrightness and his willingness to discuss some of the provisions with myself before the Bill came to this Legislative Assembly. It's acts like that which I believe make it a lot easier to understand what the legislation is, to perhaps work out what some of the problems might be in order to make sure that this Assembly works in an effective and efficient manner.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of comments on the provisions of Bill 38, which deals with professional statutes amendments, and in particular just a couple of comments with respect to the amendments to the Legal Profession Act.

Mr. Chairman, members will want to know that I do not have a professional corporation nor do I split any shares with my wife in that regard. I'm not a PC.

I thought it would be interesting to just recall for a couple of moments Bill 46 from 1990, in the Second Session of the 22nd Legislature, Bill 46 of that session being the Legal Profession Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane. It was interesting that in 1990, just a very short time ago, four years ago, this government decided on very comprehensive and sweeping changes to how the legal profession would be governed in the province of Alberta. A major and significant component of that Bill was – you guessed it – section 127 of this particular Bill. It had come about through a great deal of discussion and negotiation with the legal profession and the government, and the government at that time decided that it was appropriate, fair, reasonable, justified to go ahead with section 127 of Bill 46 in 1990. What that did, as we see in the amendments in our Bill 38 this session, Mr. Chairman, was that it allowed lawyers, through their professional corporations, to allow spouses and other members of their family to acquire nonvoting shares in their professional corporations.

So here we are, four years later, and now all of a sudden it's not the policy of government. Now all of a sudden there's a big flip-flop. The Member for Calgary-Varsity, who sponsors the Bill, says: well, you know, we had to deal with so many other professionals to try and get them the same thing, and we simply couldn't negotiate with them, so rather than working at that . . . Well, actually, Mr. Chairman, in *Hansard* from second reading yesterday, I believe – if you'll just give me a moment to find the place – it says:

These professions, Mr. Chairman, include dentists, physicians, chartered accountants, certified general accountants, certified management accountants, optometrists, and chiropractors. We were being asked either to allow these professions the same ability to split their incomes or to remove the provision from the Legal Profession Act.

Of course, it's clear that the pursuit of this government is to create level playing fields, not to extend an artificial privilege into the marketplace with respect to individual professions.

That's page 2284 of yesterday's *Hansard*, Mr. Chairman.

4:50

I'm concerned that we have in this situation a government who a very short time ago was prepared and in fact thought it fair and reasonable and justified to provide that specific provision to that specific profession and now has decided that it is not appropriate to do so. Mr. Chairman, it certainly calls into question the ability of this government to govern, and it certainly calls into question whether or not this government has any set policy in this regard or whether we simply jerk along from Bill to Bill and decide as we go just exactly how to deal with professionals in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, as I've said, I'm not affected by this, but I suspect that members of my professional community don't appreciate the government's flipping and flopping and floundering on this particular issue and would appreciate some certainty on the facts. It appears now that that community is having this particular provision pulled out from under it rather than having the government continue to pursue the same kinds of opportunities for other professionals. It's obviously disconcerting and disappointing to be going in this direction, and perhaps the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane who sponsored this Bill might be asking himself the same question, as to why all of that was done four years ago and now it's all for naught.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Those are my comments.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 38 agreed to]

MR. SMITH: I move, Mr. Chairman, that we rise and report at this juncture.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That the Bill be reported.

MR. SMITH: Yes, when we rise, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, that's exactly what I was going to say.

[Motion carried]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I don't think we're quite ready for Bill 33, so we'll go to Bill 39.

### Bill 39

#### Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 1994

MR. DAY: I move Bill 39, Mr. Chairman, for committee approval.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 39 agreed to]

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move the Bill be reported when the committee rises and reports.

[Motion carried]

**Bill 40****Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move Bill 40.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any questions on Bill 40?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 40 agreed to]

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move Bill 40 be reported when the committee rises and reports.

[Motion carried]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think we can go now to Bill 33.

**Bill 33****Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 1994**

*(continued)*

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you. The amendment has been revised in a form satisfactory to the Member for Olds-Didsbury, who has sponsored the Bill, and myself. It's just being copied as we speak. It's been approved by Parliamentary Counsel. I don't know if we have another Bill we can deal with in committee.

Well, let's address what I think is the one shortcoming in the Bill that has to be addressed, Mr. Chairman. The concern is that when the Alberta Law Reform Institute made their report – this was the report of May 1993, number 66 – what they dealt with was not only change in the Act itself but also changing the process whereby damages are set. The proposal was that damages should be revised on a more frequent basis, because what we've got now is an Act that was passed in 1979, and perhaps in 1979 it was appropriate that damages would be fixed at \$3,000, but we've seen that there have been plenty of changes since that point. The original section 8, with the \$3,000 available for nonpecuniary loss of a family member, was just seen as insulting and offensive and I think ended up inflaming the emotions of the bereaved family members and, I suppose, bringing our system of judicial compensation to disrepute. So that was a major concern.

I think I related the other day in the House an experience I had in acting for a family where first one teenage child was killed in a motor vehicle accident and then in a period of time the second child, the only other remaining child in the same family, was killed, and trying to explain to that father, Mr. Chairman, how it was possible that in a province as progressive as this one, the only nonpecuniary damages available were \$3,000. I certainly think the same reaction would apply to every other parent of a child who had been involved in that kind of a situation.

So the Alberta Law Reform Institute was responding to what I submit was a significant public demand to increase those damages. What we now have is an amendment which, thanks to the marvelous co-operation from the Member for Olds-Didsbury, we're now able to bring forward. It's not only going to address

the question of damages now, but more importantly it's going to provide that we never end up in a jam again where we go almost 20 years before we revise the damages. What we've now provided for in the amendment, which I'm now pleased to move and I think is now being distributed, is the recommendation from the Alberta Law Reform Institute in report 66, which in fact had been omitted from the Bill. What's the Bill number?

MR. ADY: Bill 39.

MR. DICKSON: From Bill 39, which is in front of us. What we now have is that this particular amendment fills that void.

MR. ADY: Sorry; Bill 33.

MR. DICKSON: Sorry; Bill 33, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry, if anybody's still paying attention in the Chamber, if I misled them. So I appreciate the assistance of members. Thanks very much.

What we're doing with this amendment, Mr. Chairman, so that we're clear, is saying that

the Executive Council shall review the level of damages set out in section 8(2) once in every 5 years from the date that section comes into force to determine the adequacy of those levels.

This may be one of the few times in this Chamber that you'll hear me suggesting that we give power to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the Executive Council.

**5:00**

My friend from Medicine Hat I think pointed out earlier that I'm singing a different tune than I have on many other Bills, where I've decried the substantial delegated power to impose regulations. This is one of those cases, Mr. Chairman and members, where it's perfectly appropriate because there's a kind of flexibility with being able to modify the level of damages every five years. So for this case I'm happy to support this delegation of power, and partly because – and I say this with particular reference to the Member for Medicine Hat – with this amendment to section 9(2) it comes back to the Legislative Assembly as a matter of information after the review is done. This doesn't happen with a lot of these regulations. What we then have is that the cabinet, Lieutenant Governor in Council can by regulation vary the amount of damages, prescribe the effective date of such change. This is the same way we do it in terms of the Judgment Interest Act, which is done by order in council. It's not done by an amendment to the statute. It's an effective way. That's done on an annual basis. This would be done every five years.

I think that this amendment makes what was a good Bill before an even better Bill, and I encourage every member of this Chamber to support it. I understand that the mover of the Bill, the Member for Olds-Didsbury, supports this amendment, and I hope that every other member will be able to support this. It's a means of bringing a level of justice to families in the tragic circumstance where they lose a family member and then find that the only compensation available is an insulting \$3,000. I encourage all members to support the amendment.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Mr. Chairman, I just have a question for the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I wonder what the difference is between Executive Council used in section 9 and Lieutenant



Governor in Council in section 10. I just wonder if there is a reason why there are the two terms.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: My understanding is that the Executive Council would be the body, a member of which would have the responsibility to inform the Legislative Assembly. I think it would probably be inaccurate or incorrect to say that the Lieutenant Governor in Council would report. You don't typically talk about a member of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. So I think the reason for the different terminology is that somebody has to be charged with the responsibility to come back to this Assembly and say: "We've done the five-year review. This is what we think the quantum of damages should be adjusted to." So at least the Legislative Assembly knows. But the body with the legislative power to enact the regulations can only be the Lieutenant Governor in Council. They are in effect the same body, but because they're discharging two different functions, they're described in the classic or traditional way.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question on the amendment?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has moved an amendment to Bill 33 by adding the following after section 5: "5.1. The following is added after section 8." I know you all have a copy, so I'm not going to read all the amendments, if that's agreeable.

[Motion on amendment carried]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 33 as amended agreed to]

MR. BRASSARD: I move that this Bill be reported when we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

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

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MR. SOHAL: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 38, Bill 39, Bill 40. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill 33. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. Some members thought you were going to make a mistake, but we knew you weren't.

All in favour of the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

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

**Bill 18**  
**Freedom of Information**  
**and Protection of Privacy Act**

MR. DICKSON: I'm delighted, Mr. Speaker, to rise and speak in support of Bill 18 at this stage.

MR. DAY: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DAY: Just a procedural point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would now move Bill 18 for third reading.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Oh, my mistake. Yes. Okay.  
The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thanks very much. Just a couple of observations about Bill 18. The first thing I want to say is that I think the government should be commended for firstly having recognized that Bill 61 and Bill 1 were badly flawed. I think the government deserves full credit and the Premier in particular for appointing his all-party panel to go out and canvass Albertans and attempt to aggregate opinion and views. I think the government deserves a great deal of credit for then incorporating many of the key recommendations from the all-party panel in the Bill, which came in front of us in the form of Bill 18.

The government deserves credit, Mr. Speaker, for taking amendments suggested by this side – and I think in particular of four pages of amendments that had been introduced by the Member for Rocky Mountain House – to attempt to address some concerns that members on this side had. Then last evening we had a situation where we introduced a further 16 amendments. One of them was accepted by the government, and I appreciate the fact that that further modification was made to the Bill.

**5:10**

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is not fully consistent, in my view, with the recommendations from the all-party panel, the unanimous recommendations. It is in my view a Bill that still does not meet the expectations of Albertans who have been waiting for a very long time for full openness and disclosure. We still have problems with paramouncy. We have problems where Albertans who wish to get access to information currently under the Alberta Hospitals Act now still must rely on the Alberta Hospitals Act to be able to get that information. Whether it's more restrictive doesn't matter. So I guess I have mixed emotions.

I want to acknowledge the work done by the Member for Rocky Mountain House in chairing the all-party panel and bringing us to a point where we got unanimous recommendations, which I think was a major, major achievement. For that I salute him, and I salute the other members from both parties that were involved on that panel. I certainly appreciate the fact that the Member for Rocky Mountain House has been prepared to meet with members of this caucus to attempt to modify the Bill.

I'm going to suggest, if I can, to all members that what we've seen on Bill 18 is an example of an alternate form of lawmaking. It's not a question of the government simply coming in and dropping a Bill on the table, circulating it around, and then we go at it hammer and tong through each of the stages of the Bill. You know, in some respects it's easier to do that. It's easier just to drop the piece of legislation in the House, and we fall into the posturing. We fall into the kinds of combative roles that seem so natural in this unique institution. But does it really make for best legislation? Is it really the best way of reflecting what Albertans want?

I want to say that the Member for Rocky Mountain House has shown us with Bill 18 that there may be a better way, that it isn't easier, but if members of government sponsoring Bills are prepared to meet with representatives of the opposition, are prepared to invest the time to sit and address the merits of proposed amendments, it doesn't mean all those problems are going to disappear, and it doesn't mean there's going to be full agreement. What it means, Mr. Speaker, is that when a Bill comes back into the Chamber, we marshal our time in a way that's most effective. We then have defined the issues. We know where the differences are. We've been able to eliminate all the areas where there's common agreement.

The Member for Rocky Mountain House has I think pioneered with this Bill a path, as I say, that means a bigger investment in time. It means more negotiation. It means more listening. But he's been successful in bringing a Bill which I think is much improved even over the Bill 18 we looked at just before the Easter break. So I want to congratulate him, and I want to congratulate the government for showing sufficient flexibility to at least ensure that we had those amendments out there.

I'm going to continue and I expect members of my caucus are going to talk to Albertans about the balance of changes that we think are necessary to make this Bill better. It may soon be an Act, but I think we still have an expectation. Albertans want genuine freedom of information. We're not there yet. We're going to have to work hard still to give them that additional access.

I guess the other thing that we'll have to address now will be questions in terms of timing and when the freedom of information regime will apply in this province. I have to ensure that there are adequate resources made available so that this Bill will come in and be operative sooner rather than later. But we've at least reached this point, and it's been a lot of effort. A lot of effort.

I also want to particularly acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, the contribution by the Member for Edmonton-Manning and the Member for Edmonton-Glenora in this caucus, who have invested a lot of time and energy in what is a very technical Bill, and I think they've played a large role and provided a lot of leadership in this caucus in terms of addressing Bill 18. As I said before, I just appreciate very much the effort from each one of the government members who participated in this process.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd just say that we're much better off in Alberta now than we were in September when we looked at Bill 1, but we're not as far along the road to genuine freedom of information as I'd hoped we'd be. We'll just have to work harder in terms of trying to make those further changes. But let's acknowledge how far we've come and what we've been able to achieve to this point.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to thank our Premier for setting up the committee, an all-party committee, and allowing me the opportunity to chair that committee. It was certainly a tremendous challenge as we took out through the province the proposed legislation and heard from Albertans and then came back and worked diligently with all members of the committee to come up with Bill 18.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for his kind comments and for all the sincere work that he did as well on behalf of the Liberal caucus as we worked through the Bill in the Legislature. I want to say a special thank you as well to the other committee members: the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, the hon. Member for Peace River, along with of course the hon. members for Calgary-Buffalo, Edmonton-Manning, and Edmonton-Glenora. It was truly a team effort. While the committee didn't have overwhelming participation at all of our public hearings, we certainly did have a lot of written material sent to us and some very quality presentations that we had to take into consideration.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo mentioned that he felt that there probably were areas where the Bill could be improved. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased with how close this Bill comes to incorporating all of the recommendations of the all-party panel. True, there are some minor things that were not included. As you develop the structure, you have to consider cost in today's society, and we had to do that. Also, we had to make sure that the Bill is one that is workable and manageable. So you may find a slight variation there, but I think we really did accomplish a lot in this Bill.

One of the things that I do want to mention is the fact that in this Bill we do have the three-year review. I believe that is a very important feature that will allay some of the concerns that may be still out there. People will see that in fact it does work, or if it doesn't work, there will be the ability to upgrade the legislation at that point.

I believe one of the key figures that will be involved in implementing this Act will be the commissioner. That's going to be a very key position, particularly in view of the fact that the commissioner will have power, will make rulings. Certainly there is discretion in the Act in certain areas, so that position is going to be pivotal.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, the objectives of the committee. As we went out through the province, early in the process we agreed that we did want to come back with a Bill that was equal to or better than any other in Canada. While my hon. colleague for Calgary-Buffalo may not agree totally, I am confident that we did accomplish that. There are some differences of opinion in certain sections, but generally speaking, I believe we now in Alberta have a Bill, access to information, freedom of information, that is superior. Probably equally as important, we have come up with a Bill that will protect one's privacy. Certainly it's been the indication from other provinces that that becomes probably the area that gives more public concern than the freedom of information, because as we move forward in this high-tech world, the ability for government and, down the way, the private sector to gather information and disseminate that information is moving very rapidly. We have to be sure that personal information is protected.

One of the things that I'm sure will be looked at before long – we heard on a number of occasions that the public wanted this to go into the private sector, to be not just an Act that governs public bodies. So that's something that will be looked at in the near future.

So with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I would move third reading of Bill 18, freedom of information.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House has moved third reading of Bill 18, Freedom of

Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Does the Assembly agree?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? The motion is carried unanimously.

[Bill 18 read a third time]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]

