

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 22, 1995**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 95/02/22

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE 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. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise in the Assembly today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a very special guest seated in your gallery. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Ms Elsie Wayne. Ms Wayne was elected to the House of Commons as the Member of Parliament for Saint John for the first time in the federal general election of October 1993. Ms Wayne possesses a wealth of municipal public office experience which serves her well in her new position. She was first elected to the Saint John Common Council in 1977 and elected mayor of Saint John in 1983. Ms Wayne was re-elected as mayor in 1986, 1989, and 1992. I would ask that Ms Wayne rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, members of the Assembly, I am pleased to introduce today Mr. Masuji Yamamoto, consul general of Japan in Edmonton. Mr. Yamamoto is accompanied by Mr. David Kern, the executive clerk, political section, at the consulate general. Mr. Yamamoto took up his duties as consul general in Edmonton in December of 1994. He's led a distinguished career in international affairs prior to his posting here, having served his country in such places as Afghanistan, Kenya, New Zealand, Thailand, Indonesia, United Kingdom, United States, and most recently India. We're very honoured to welcome the consul general to Alberta. Japan has long been Alberta's most important offshore trading partner, and we also enjoy a growing relationship across a broad spectrum of cultural, academic, scientific, and people-to-people activities. This year is the 15th anniversary of Alberta's twinning with Hokkaido prefecture. It is a relationship which we are very proud of and which symbolizes the strong and important ties we have with Japan. I know that Mr. Yamamoto is committed to further enhancing our relationship. I'd ask Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Kern to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition from 42 Albertans. They are urging the government to continue to develop our greatest resource, our young people, by giving them 400 hours of early childhood education at no additional cost. They're from Canmore, Alberta, the Banff-Cochrane riding I believe.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 182 residents of Edmonton requesting the Alberta school boards "to use money from the Alberta School Foundation Fund" for early childhood education.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition today signed by 15 people from St. Albert urging the government to fully fund ECS.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that my petition of February 16 urging the government to restore kindergarten to 400 hours be read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned Residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure all Alberta school boards provide the opportunity for each eligible child to receive a minimum of 400 hours of Early Childhood Services instruction per year.

We also request the Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to allow Alberta School Boards to use money from the Alberta School Foundation Fund to fund 400 hours or more of Early Childhood Services, as determined by the local community, so that there are no ECS user fees for 400 hour programs and so that all Alberta children have an equal opportunity or "level playing field" to succeed and compete in life by having equal access to basic educational resources.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I introduced on February 16 with respect to hospital closures in southwestern Alberta now be read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to ensure that no hospital beds are closed in South Western Alberta by an unelected Regional Health Authority without adequate consultation with residents.

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition which I presented on February 16 concerning early childhood education be now read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned Residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure all Alberta school boards provide the opportunity for each eligible child to receive a minimum of 400 hours of Early Childhood Services instruction per year.

We also request the Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to allow Alberta School Boards to use money from the Alberta School Foundation Fund to fund 400 hours or more of Early Childhood Services, as determined by the local community, so that there are no ECS user fees for 400 hour programs and so

that all Alberta children have an equal opportunity or "level playing field" to succeed and compete in life by having equal access to basic educational resources.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

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

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I would like to table the report of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices recommending the reappointment of Harley A. Johnson as Ombudsman for the province of Alberta for a five-year term.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendation of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices passed on January 18, 1995, to recommend to his Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor that Mr. Harley A. Johnson be reappointed as Ombudsman for the province of Alberta for a further period of five years.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

**Bill 6
Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act**

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act. This being a money Bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this Bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this is an historic piece of legislation. It is the first time that a government has prescribed a legislated requirement that the government shall not run a deficit. It also spells out a legislated plan to pay down the province's net debt.

[Leave granted; Bill 6 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table one copy of a report entitled Perspectives on Quality Education prepared by the Students' Union at the University of Calgary. The report uses five quality indicators to indicate that the post-secondary education system is becoming second-rate "because of systemic underfunding and shortsighted slashing."

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table with the Assembly today four copies of the 1994 annual report of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association.

I would also like at this time to table with the Assembly four copies of the report of my recent investment and trade mission to the midwest and to Mexico.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

1:40

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature two groups who are visiting us today. The first is a group of 18 students from the Gold Bar school in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are accompanied by their teacher Kim Holroyd and parents Mr. Howard Bye, Mrs. Mary Jane Park, Mr. George Gallimore, and Mrs. Agnes Biri. They're in the members' gallery, and I'd invite them to rise and be welcomed by the Assembly.

I'd also like, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to members some delegates who are here from the SALT organization. This is an organization of advocates for seniors. They have done outstanding research on behalf of seniors in Alberta. They are in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and be welcomed by the House.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you today three visiting groups from the excellent school J.H. Picard, which exists in the riding of Edmonton-Avonmore. They are seated throughout both galleries, and they are accompanied today by their teachers Mrs. Pardell, M. Jacques, Mrs. Knopp, and parent helpers Mr. Wylie, Mr. Belsey, Mrs. Montgomery, Mrs. Crummy, Mrs. Jawhari, Mrs. Lobkowicz, as well as Mrs. Broadbent. I would ask all 69 of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our House. Je vous dis bienvenue.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly today a musical group from British Columbia that's traveling in our province. Actually, one of the group is also here availing herself of our excellent advanced education opportunities. I would ask this family - I know it looks like three sisters, but in fact one is the mother - Shirley, Jessica, and Paige Sloan, to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period
Provincial Budget**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, we now know what the Premier means when he says "people, prosperity, and preservation." It's very clear from this budget that "people" means his ministers, "prosperity" means ministerial office budgets, and "preservation" means empire building in these offices. Government has to set reasonable priorities and make responsible choices. Why is the Premier pumping even more money into still plusher ministerial offices while he's taking \$276 million out of the health care system and laying off health care professionals all across this province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that my office hasn't changed probably since the days of Peter Lougheed. I don't know what's happening in the other ministerial offices, but we'd be very, very happy to have a little walk around and do an inspection and report back to the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, it's interesting that the Premier would aspire to the levels of expenditure of the Lougheed days.

Can the Premier explain why he is increasing budgets for his foreign offices, those pastures for retired Tories, while he is increasing his health care taxes by \$58 million?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, over the years the amount spent on foreign offices has been reduced considerably. The staff in the Hong Kong office is down significantly. In New York it's down significantly. In London it's down significantly. In Ottawa it's down significantly. Those foreign offices, sir, have been asked to abide by the same guidelines that apply to all departments of government and all agencies that look to government for funding.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans will remember them taking \$800,000 from the L.A. office and increasing funding across their offices.

How can the Premier even contemplate increasing his paving budget by \$21 million when he is cutting health care, increasing health care taxes by \$58 million, and laying off health care workers all across this province? The Premier is putting paving ahead of people.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation and Utilities has been asked to do the same as every other department, and that is to reduce expenditures. Certainly the hon. minister has his list of priorities. Just because we're undergoing some revolutionary change within government, that doesn't mean to say that we're going to abandon our obligation to maintain essential human and physical infrastructure.

MR. MITCHELL: Twenty-five million dollars in kindergarten funding isn't essential, but paving roads is.

While this government is firing health care workers and forcing doctors, due to its policies, to leave the province, the Premier himself has actually added staff to the Department of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, which is already one of the largest and most bureaucratic of such offices in the country. To the Premier: why does he need to expand his intergovernmental affairs department to 77 employees when Ontario needs only 60 and British Columbia can manage somehow with 16?

MR. KLEIN: Well, you know, comparing Alberta to B.C. and Ontario is really comparing apples to grapes and bananas. Mr. Speaker, the functions of these offices are obviously quite different, and relative to the operation of the department I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, the estimates will be coming up for the department, and we can go into it in detail. But right on the surface there was not in the last budget a ministerial office because the Premier had that portfolio. When you put a minister in charge of an office, there are some staff requirements, and that was the adjustment. Otherwise there is a decrease in the department. I'll be very happy during the estimates to go through it in detail.

MR. MITCHELL: How can the Premier justify actually adding staff to this department when it already has four assistant deputy ministers making an average salary of \$97,000 per year and 23 middle managers pulling down \$70,000 a year, Mr. Speaker, all to manage 44 people?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that as we go through Committee of Supply, the hon. member will have ample opportunity to ask the minister these questions in detail.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I can supplement again. The budget for Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs has decreased. There are more FTEs because of a minister now being put in that portfolio. Otherwise there is a decrease in the FTEs, and there is a decrease in the overall budget of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs.

MR. MITCHELL: How can the Premier cut health care by \$275 million, increase health care taxes by \$58 million, and then turn around and increase the minister's office by 85 percent?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. Leader of the Opposition hasn't been listening to the answers. The budget is down. FIGA has been asked to do as every other department has been asked to do, and that is to reduce expenditures by approximately 20 percent over a three-year period. That has been done. The department is on track. The business plan has been out there for some time. Again, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition missed the answer, I would ask him to listen carefully as the minister once more explains.

1:50

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, the FTEs are up because of the ministerial office being established. You take the FTEs from that out, and there is a decrease in the FTEs from what was there before. The overall spending profile of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs is down, and we are meeting the target as set out. I think they do need a little help in their research.

MR. MITCHELL: There certainly wasn't a decrease in the number of ADMs earning \$97,000 per year.

Municipal Taxation

MR. MITCHELL: We know, Mr. Speaker, that property tax is a highly regressive tax that hurts those Albertans on fixed or low incomes, especially seniors. Education is not a utility like roads or sewers and should be funded more from the provincial general revenues and less from local property taxes. Since this Premier has assumed office and since he has grabbed \$1.3 billion of the property tax base from local school authorities, property taxes to fund education have increased by almost 25 percent. Why is the Premier off-loading education costs onto property taxes when education stakeholders have been calling for exactly the opposite thing to occur?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. If you look at the list, and certainly the hon. Minister of Education could elaborate further – no, he's not here today; okay – you will find that in most cases relative to municipal jurisdictions throughout this country, the tax rate is actually going down. But what I would do, because it's improper to pose a question to the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, is again wonder out loud. I'll wonder out loud if he thinks that it's fair that some jurisdictions because of a lucrative property tax base should be able to spend up to \$16,000 per student while other jurisdictions can only spend about \$3,000 per student. Is that his idea of being fair?

DR. WEST: The Liberals in this country brought in property tax.

THE SPEAKER: Order.

DR. WEST: The Liberals brought it in.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities does not have the floor.

MR. MITCHELL: I'll tell the Premier what isn't being fair.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The supplemental question.

MR. MITCHELL: Why is the Premier putting even more pressure on property taxes when municipalities are already feeling the pressure because of his government's off-loading onto municipalities of over \$250 million worth of provincial programs?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I don't consider it off-loading. Basically, we have challenged the municipalities to do as universities have been asked to do, as hospitals have been asked to do, as school boards have been asked to do, and that is to find new and better and more effective and more efficient ways of doing things. And, by the way, relative to municipalities, especially the major municipalities, I would challenge them at this particular time and very publicly to set the tone and show the way, because municipal leaders in both Calgary and Edmonton have been virtually the leaders in jurisdictions who have not set the tone by reducing their own salaries or looking at their own pension plans.

MR. MITCHELL: This former municipal leader, of course, increased the debt of Calgary from \$400 million to \$1.2 billion.

How does the Premier explain his increased property tax burden for seniors and pensioners on fixed incomes when they are already struggling to maintain their own homes? That, Mr. Premier, is not fair.

MR. KLEIN: Well, I try not to get personal about these particular issues, but if he wants to go back to the time I was the mayor of that city, I'd like to remind the hon. member that when I was elected there, they had a projected capital budget of \$3.5 billion. I took my council through a forced decision model to scale that down to \$1.6 billion. Now, this hon. member thought we were doing such a good job that he came to visit me when I was the mayor, as he was running for the leadership, to find out how he could stab his buddies Nick and Laurence in the back.

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

Opposition Fiscal Plan

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Reform Party of Canada has released an alternate budget to the Liberal government's budget, which they have titled the Taxpayers' Budget. The Canadian labour movement has already released an alternate budget which is reported in a news clipping. I have the required number of each, which I would like to table with the House. My questions are for the Provincial Treasurer. Can the Treasurer inform the House if the opposition has plans to provide him with an alternate budget?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that other parties have provided the material that the hon. member has filed in the House today, but I can assure him and all hon. members that my worthy opposition Treasury critic, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, has not provided me with his party's budget proposals, and I can only surmise that the Liberals do not have a financial plan. Either that or he is bound by party discipline to not reveal the truth, the real truth about the cost of the proposals put forward

by the Leader of the Opposition in his Speech to the Throne. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. Even puffballs seem to get the desired result, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Liberals are unwilling to confirm the cost of the programs proposed in their Speech to the Throne and other statements in the House, can the Treasurer provide the Assembly with an estimate of the impact of such promises on our fiscal position in 1995-96?

MR. DINNING: I would be delighted to provide that information. In the absence of full disclosure and accountability by the Liberal Party, Mr. Speaker, I have had the benefit of reading their Speech to the Throne and have had some work, some careful work done on that. God forbid, but if the Liberals were in a position to implement their plan, our deficit this year would balloon to \$1.95 billion, and in 1996-97 it would be another \$1.6 billion, exactly in the year they were not allowed to run a deficit. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. The Provincial Treasurer appears to have touched a nerve.

MR. DINNING: Just to complete my answer, Mr. Speaker, as the members wouldn't let me, the fact is that the net debt would rise by 50 percent to 12 and one-quarter billion dollars, and Albertans I believe should be alarmed by that kind of fiscal profligacy. Just so all members have the benefit of this information, I want to file with this Assembly our estimated costs of what the Liberals' promises are as spelled out in the Speech to the Throne.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly shocked by that answer.

Mr. Speaker, what would happen to Alberta's personal income tax rate if the Liberals' plan were to be implemented?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has pointed out, Albertans have every right to be concerned by this kind of profligacy, because I estimate that under the Liberal regime, provincial income tax rates would rise by 50 percent in this province to an all-Canadian high of 68 and a half percent of federal basic tax. It would be a shame, and Albertans would rue the day if the Liberals were ever in a position to implement their plan.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, for once I agree with one of the *Sun* reporters talking about a fear-mongering Treasurer.

2:00 Access to Budget Information

MR. BRUSEKER: One of the principles of fairness and equity in our parliamentary system is that the budget must remain secret until presented in this Chamber. Security of the budget is critical to ensure that no one who would see it ahead of time could gain a monetary advantage by receiving information in advance. Mr. Speaker, parliamentary tradition indicates that finance ministers have lost their jobs over budget leaks, and it's apparent by the budget that was released yesterday that one media outlet in particular had advance information. My question is to the Treasurer. What's the Treasurer doing to prevent and plug leaks like what occurred in his department?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to rely on the traditions of parliamentary democracy whereby the media, the press gallery, has access on an embargo basis to the facts about Alberta's budget. I'm going to rely on that tradition, that custom to prevail, because in our case we trust the media.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary question is also to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer explain, then, how it is that a week in advance of the budget being presented yesterday one media outlet had the exact figures for the 1994-95 surplus and the exact figure for the projected deficit for this upcoming budget?

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, my final supplemental, again to the Treasurer: how can the Treasurer assure the House and all Albertans, then, that other individuals did not receive this same information in advance and have a monetary, financial gain?

MR. DINNING: I can give that assurance, Mr. Speaker, and I think I can safely say that Albertans learned yesterday that we have a plan, we're sticking to our plan, and we're going to get our finances down to a position where we can afford to deliver quality programs whether we're at the top of the economic cycle or whether we're not. We're doing what we promised to do for Albertans, and we will live up to that promise.

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

Job Creation

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jobs for my constituents and all Albertans are top priority. The Premier recognized this early in his term. In the document Seizing Opportunity he promised to deliver 110,000 jobs. The budget has a big impact on prosperity. Can the Premier report how he's done in meeting his commitment?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it quite clear that the government did not say at any time that it would create 110,000 new jobs. [interjections] Just a moment. Listen. I'm going to say it again. I said that the government would create the environment for the private sector to create 110,000 new jobs. Since December of 1992 89,000 new private-sector jobs have been created, and, sir, it's projected that by the end of this year, not fiscal 1996-97 but by the end of this year, the private sector will have created 113,000 new jobs.

MR. SEVERTSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's good news, but with the price of natural gas falling in the past year and a number of wells being shut in, there are sure to be job losses in the Alberta energy sector. My question to the Premier: what effect will this have on his projection of 113,000 jobs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's for precisely that reason that we budgeted relative to economic growth on the conservative side. If the Liberals will care to note, much of the government's plan has been based on the recommendations of the Financial Review Commission. We pay a lot of attention to those recommendations

because they are very sound and wise recommendations indeed. One of the recommendations relative to economic growth was that budget estimates for revenues and expenditures should be based on realistic and conservative assumptions . . . If resource revenue exceeds this amount, the difference should not be regarded as available for current year's spending, but should be allocated to debt reduction.

That's exactly what we did this year. We had a surplus of \$110 million. We dedicated that entirely to debt. We budgeted economic growth on the conservative side to ensure that in fact if we suffer a decrease in oil and gas prices, if farm receipts are down, if forestry is down, then we are able to accommodate that decline in economic growth and still maintain our fiscal program.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Provincial Tax Regime

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is deliberately misleading Albertans when it argues that it is not increasing taxes. This government more than any other government has relied upon hidden and regressive taxes passed by order in council. I am now tabling a list of 246 new and increased taxes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: How many?

DR. PERCY: Two hundred and forty-six taxes have been implemented by this government since June 15, 1993, and will have yielded at least \$221 million in revenue. My questions are to the Premier. Mr. Premier, how can you claim that your government has not increased taxes when the evidence shows that you have implemented at least 246 new or increased fees, levies, and taxes?

MR. KLEIN: Well, fees, levies, and taxes. Mr. Speaker, I have three documents. Right? I don't need to table them because they have been tabled in this Legislature already. The first one is Budget '93, the second one is Budget '94, and the third one is Budget '95. Now, under selected premiums, fees, and charges it's all outlined. It's all outlined there. As a matter of fact, in 1993 we took this out to the public. We took this out to the public, and guess what the public told us? "We like what we see," because they elected us and not you.

In 1994 we clearly published all the – what is it called here – selected premiums, fees, and charges. Nothing hidden, well documented, nothing hidden. In 1995 we published the same document again outlining openly and publicly all the rate changes relative to premiums, fees, and charges, so I don't know what the hon. member is complaining about.

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, I couldn't have asked for a better answer, because, Mr. Premier, 160 – listen – 160 of these new taxes, levies, and charges were imposed by cabinet regulation and did not appear in the '93 and '94 budgets. One hundred and sixty. [interjections]

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they are all here. [interjections] They are all in the business plans. I ask . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order please. Order. [interjections] Order please. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has asked a

question. The Premier is entitled to answer the question, hon. members. [interjections] Order. Order.

The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question demonstrates his total lack of knowledge relative to government procedure. First of all, nothing is hidden. He alluded to orders in council. Well, the last time I looked, every order in council passed by the government of this province is a public document.

2:10

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, how can you tell a family that earns just \$12,621 a year that the \$816 a year they now pay for health care as a result of your head tax is not a tax and not a regressive tax at that? That's over 6 and a half percent of their income.

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, it is not a tax; it is a premium. It is a premium. A tax is really quite specific. Quite specific. It can be a dedicated tax, and I don't know of any that exist here.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Ontario has a payroll tax.

MR. KLEIN: Right. It could be a payroll tax.

By and large taxes go into the general revenue fund. The premiums for health care go into the health care insurance fund. It is run like an insurance company, and the amount that people pay in premiums clearly reflects the cost of providing the service. Well, not all the cost, because what we do want to achieve – and it has been clearly set out in the budget plan – is a level whereby premiums cover 20 percent of health care, and that has been spelled out. There has been nothing secret about that. As a matter of fact that was spelled out in 1993, when we filed our first budget and took it to the public and got elected on that budget.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair would recognize the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, who is celebrating her birthday today. [interjections]

MRS. GORDON: How old would you be if you didn't know how old you were?

Provincial Debt

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents support the Premier's plan to get our fiscal house in order, balancing the budget and restructuring the way government operates. Contrasted with the go slow, head in the sand approach proposed by the Liberals, my constituents are encouraged that we've stayed the course and we're getting the job done. When it comes to dealing with the debt, they want to know how much we owe. My question is to the hon. Treasurer. What is our total debt, net and gross, and how does this relate to the Deficit Elimination Act?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans do want to know answers to questions like that, and I'm glad the hon. member has put it forward so that her constituents can read about this in *Hansard*. The fact is that the financial assets of the province, verified by the Auditor General and by an independent review of

the financial assets of the heritage fund, are valued at \$18.3 billion at March 31, 1994. Our total liabilities include borrowings through the general revenue fund for past deficits, for the Municipal Financing Corporation, for the Social Housing Corporation, for the Alberta Opportunity Company, and for the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. All of those combined with pension liabilities and other liabilities of the government are some \$31.7 billion at March 31, 1994, for a net debt of some \$13.4 billion. Clearly, what our plan does is spell out that we will address that debt which is not addressed by a plan, such as the pension liabilities which are addressed by a plan. We'll focus on the net debt, the remaining \$8.3 billion that puts us most at risk, that makes us vulnerable to the volatility in interest rates.

Mr. Speaker, finally, as it relates to the Deficit Elimination Act, the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act requires that a government shall not run a deficit.

THE SPEAKER: First supplemental.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you. What evidence does Treasury have to ensure that the value of the province's assets are indeed realistic?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, it's a good point, because there are questions that are asked on the reliability of our numbers. I would simply point out that the Auditor General was here for the Budget Address yesterday. He signs his professional opinion. The Member for Calgary-West of course would understand this because he is a chartered accountant and has signed his name as a professional opinion to many an account. Of course, the leader of the Liberal opposition would know about this, because in the Principal affair the accountants couldn't sign their name to an opinion, and they were concerned about this.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that those assets, verified by the Auditor General, verified by four leading investment dealers in this province, have put our estimated assets in the order of \$18.3 billion at March 31, '94.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you. My third question: what is the total amount of money owing that the province of Alberta is paying interest on?

MR. DINNING: The borrowings that we have had to go out to the market to make are those primarily from the general revenue fund. They are spelled out in the budget plan, and they estimate at March 31, 1994, in the order of some \$19.6 billion. Some of those, Mr. Speaker, are backed up by assets, and others are backed up by a legislated plan. It's the \$8.3 billion that our net debt plan attack focuses on so that we can get rid of that vulnerability and get our interest costs at the same level as our interest income, and we'll end up at a point where we own more than we owe.

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

Family Violence

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The budget document acknowledges that violence against women and children will increase and that shelters in the province will continue to maintain high overall occupancy. In fact, over 4,000 women and

children were turned away from shelters last year. Despite this revelation, the government chose to cut more than 2 and a half million dollars from the budget of the office for the prevention of family violence. So much for priorities: keep those foreign offices, but turn away abused women and children. My question is to the Premier. What is the rationale for cutting the family violence office when you know that demand for education, prevention services, and shelters is increasing?

MR. KLEIN: I'm going to ask the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services to supplement, but the budget in no way, shape, or form acknowledges that there will be an increase in family violence due to fundamental restructuring of the way this essential service is delivered. I will ask the hon. minister to respond.

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

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you are aware, our department will be redirecting close to \$100 million to high-needs areas in the next two years. We've outlined priorities of where the dollars could go. It covers three major areas. Personal support services, child welfare services, and assured income for the severely handicapped will take about \$7 million of that \$100 million. We've also indicated that as we move forward with the changes, we will look at other high-needs areas. This issue may be one that could be dealt with through that process.

I believe that the opposition just the other day, Mr. Speaker, also asked the same question in relation to the shelters. What I indicated at the time was that paying off mortgages would allow us to spend another \$700,000 per year, which could be directed not specifically to that area but some of it could be.

MRS. SOETAERT: I asked for that to be equally distributed.

My second supplemental to the Premier: how can you justify spending close to \$4 million on foreign offices and half a million dollars on a Beijing training centre while thousands of women and children fleeing abuse can't get the help they need?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you've got to put everything into context. This hon. member will never know because she will never be part of the government. There are numerous departments of government. The government is a very large, global enterprise that promotes economic development, that has an obligation to sustain roads, has a responsibility to provide reasonable social safety nets, has a responsibility to health, has a responsibility to education, has a responsibility for the protection of the environment, has a responsibility for the maintenance of all public buildings, has a responsibility for universities and colleges, has a responsibility to the farmers and to sustain a strong rural economy, has a responsibility for the promotion of science and research, has a responsibility for numerous community services, has a responsibility for law, order, and good government. Mr. Speaker, we have lots of responsibilities. [interjections]

2:20

MRS. SOETAERT: I don't find this topic very amusing, Mr. Speaker.

My final supplemental I'll try to the minister responsible for women's issues. If you really have met with women's shelters,

how come you haven't figured out their critical needs: crisis intervention, prevention, counseling, and space?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government continues to view the elimination of violence against women and violence in general against all Albertans as a priority. Of course the Minister of Family and Social Services has already talked about the important role of the office of prevention of family violence, and it continues to remain in the forefront in Canada to have initiatives that address the issue of violence. Over and above that, further than that, there are also programs that are in other departments as well. The Department of Justice of course has made its recent amendments to the Maintenance Enforcement Act. The Department of Justice also actively continues to enforce its charging policy in the case of domestic violence.

Indeed, there are a great number of things that are happening throughout the province of Alberta. For example, in 1994 one of the first ever in Canada domestic violence registry teams was established to encourage police services to set up restraining order registries on their CPIC system. As of December of 1994 all Alberta police services have established such registries. As well, the violence program assistance fund continues to support such programs as outreach for victims of domestic violence, court orientation, and support.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify a couple of issues. When you look at the budget for '93-94 for the office of prevention of family violence, in fact the budget was \$7.8 million. Projections for '94-95 are \$10.4 million, in fact a major increase, and 93 percent of that goes to the 345 spaces provided for women's shelters.

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

Regional Health Authorities

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health. In this year's budget you have provided a one-time funding increase of \$40 million to health care. I find this a curious thing to do at this time, when we're still cutting millions from health care. Is this an admission that the health care restructuring has been too quick, too fast and that the regional health care authorities have been unable to handle it?

MRS. McCLELLAN: No, indeed, Mr. Speaker. Quite the contrary. We are still on target with our budget, but we are also doing as we promised, and we are listening. The regional health authorities have told us: we want to get on with the job, but there are some one-time costs that we will incur, and we need some help in this transition time. As the Premier indicated clearly over and over again in this province, when somebody raises a concern, we will listen. We've listened to the regional health authorities. I have sat down with both the major centres and the regions and listened carefully to their requests and their needs, and this is our response.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thirty-two million dollars of the \$40 million is being provided to Edmonton and Calgary, with only \$6 million being provided to the other 15 regional authorities. Why are you favouring the major centres by giving them the lion's share of the money without taking into account the sparsity and distance in rural Alberta and smaller urban areas?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there are some very good reasons for Calgary and Edmonton receiving the major share of this. First of all, I would indicate that Calgary and Edmonton have been advanced in their planning for downsizing and transition and are fully a year ahead of the other regions in this province. I think we would want to commend Calgary and Edmonton for their planning and moving ahead. So they obviously were in more need.

The other part, Mr. Speaker, is that it's very relative. Calgary and Edmonton budgets are the greater share of health spending in this province, and that is due to the size of their populations, the fact that they are referral points for many of our programs and referral points for all of our provincial programs. So we felt that it was a fair and an equitable distribution.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Are there restrictions on how the regional authorities can use the \$40 million?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, very clearly the regional health authorities are in the best position to know where these dollars can be used most effectively. However, I have cautioned them to use them very prudently. They are one-time dollars. They are to assist them in transition. I have every confidence in the regional health authorities in this province to use those dollars most effectively for their citizens.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Special Waste Management Corporation

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans pour more than \$20 million each year into the Swan Hills waste treatment plant so this government can ensure that Bovar gets a profit, those taxpayers are entitled to a clear and accurate accounting of those dollars. When it comes to the accounting for the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, the lifeblood and guarantor of Bovar, Albertans do not get a clear picture of how taxpayers' dollars are turned into Bovar profits. My question is to the Minister of Environmental Protection. In incorporating the new fully consolidated budget approach, does the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation incur a net expenditure, as stated in the minister's pro forma presentation in the budget, or does it generate a net revenue, as stated elsewhere in the same budget document?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spirit of brevity, in fact there is a deficit.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain how this new accounting system that is so confusing helps Albertans understand how their hard-earned tax dollars are turned into profits for Bovar?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the new board that we put in place, one of the things we will be insisting is that there be a more concise and easily understood financial record.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the minister has now indicated that there will be a deficit, can the minister explain why the budget document indicates that the Special Waste Management Corporation will have net revenue of \$5 million? Why is it in the budget if it's not true?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member hasn't talked to any of his accounting friends, because if you do know how accounting works, you will determine that in fact there is a deficit.

Range Improvement Program

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Over 125 years ago the dominion government established a process of cattle-grazing leases throughout southern and southwestern Alberta, including all of my constituency of Highwood. The good stewardship of these ranchers is a proud Alberta tradition. In recent decades financial assistance for range improvement projects on public grazing land has been provided to help maintain and improve the carrying capacity as well as manage and provide for other uses of grazing disposition areas. Will the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development confirm or deny that the range improvement program is being ended?

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

2:30

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No. The program will continue. Indeed, this has been a very valued program that was built up through the years and proven to be a very successful program. The one item that is changing, though – and there are some changes coming to this program – is that the rental credit and the rental exemption aspects of the program will no longer be in place. This process will be changed to a tenure type of a process, where indeed if you do a certain amount of development, you'll be able to have a certain length of time added to the lease that has been established in the first place.

MR. TANNAS: My first supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. What assurance can the minister give to Albertans that there is a planning process in place to prevent the landscape and the grazing capacity from possible irretrievable damage?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you again. This is a very important question. Indeed, there is a planning process that takes place on these delicate lands. We have to accord the requirements to make sure that the delicacy of those lands is recognized and that indeed the productivity of those lands is continued. What happens before there is any lease allocation for rehabilitation or development is that our planning people sit down with the proponent and devise a scheme that's going to meet all of the needs of the habitat, of the environmental issues, of the water issues so that the land is indeed the very most productive and achieves to the fullest element that it possibly can as far as the desired outcome is concerned.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister abrogate existing commitments in outstanding range improvement agreements?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Signed applications and those applications that have already been received and are being enacted will all be recognized and will all be accorded their right due. Those indeed will be allowed to be brought forward to their completion. Only those applications that are coming forward after budget day, which was yesterday, will meet the new process that will be put in place. However, I think it's very critical and I think it's very important that we recognize the value of this program and that the ongoing component of this program will indeed be in place.

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

Students Finance

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The folly of the government's cut now and plan later bumbling is becoming painfully expensive. Thousands of Albertans dumped off social services and into advanced education programs have resulted in a budget shortfall of \$24 million, a shortfall that will be made up on the backs of students. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development: how many students will be denied a postsecondary education so that \$10 million of that shortfall can be taken from the student loan program?

MR. ADY: Not any, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. How much will living allowances of needy students be cut to help make up for this gross under-planning?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, I'm really having a difficult time understanding the line of questioning here. The funding that has flowed through to the students in the skills development program administered by our department I believe is in fact more lucrative than the funding that was available to people when they were on straight supports for independence funds in this province. So I'm not sure where the member is coming from, because as I said earlier, they receive more funding with the program for skills development in training than they did previously.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Will the minister confirm that he has considered cutting the adult English as a Second Language program?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, we have English as a Second Language programs in a variety of places. They're offered in this province, and certainly we have every intention that that program will continue. I'm not sure again where the member is getting this kind of information, because we have every intention that that program will continue and be available to those residents of Alberta that require it.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The time for question period has expired.

Was there a point of order? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Point of Order Misleading the House

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to cite Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) together with *Beauchesne* 489, 491, and 492. It concerns a question by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to the Premier. He used the words "deliberately misleading Albertans."

I would also in the reference like to refer to a point of order that was made, I believe, in the fall sitting of the Second Session of the 23rd Legislature. At that time there was an allegation made with regard to the Provincial Treasurer – and I believe it was by the Member for Edmonton-Manning – with very similar wording. At that time I rose on a point of order, and the wisdom of the Chair upheld that point of order.

The essence of the citation is in the context in which the words are used. Certainly there are references in *Beauchesne*, indeed in section 490, where the term "misleading" has been ruled parliamentary. On the other hand, in 491 and 492 it quite clearly sets out the context of using the word "misleading," particularly when it's used in the context of deliberate and particularly when they refer to either the public, to this Assembly, or in this particular case to all Albertans.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you rule.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would like to respond.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the point of order, I would say that I referred to government in the corporate sense. I did not personalize it to any one individual. Secondly, I referred to Albertans. I clearly meant those outside of this House, because the members on the opposite side have already clearly made up their minds. So I referred to people outside of the House. I wasn't referring to individuals in the House in terms of "deliberately misleading," and I was referring to government in the corporate sense. So I believe there is no merit to the hon. member's point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Well, this point of order indicates that "mislead" is one of those very sensitive words. The Chair made some comments I believe last week about another one of those words that in the minds of some people indicates that people are lying. Maybe it was the word "mislead" itself.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the Chair believes, was careful not to use the word in relation to an individual member of the Assembly, and there is in the Chair's point of view merit to his saying that he used it in the corporate sense by accusing the government and not any particular member of the government of misleading the Assembly. Of course, that's another point. The term was "misleading Albertans," not the Assembly.

Therefore, in the context in which the word was used today, the Chair can't find that it was unparliamentary but again would remind all hon. members that that word is a very sensitive word in this Chamber and should be used with care.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

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

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that the motions for returns standing on today's Order Paper retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

**2:40 Bill 202
School (Early Childhood Services)
Amendment Act, 1995**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present and to ask the House's concurrence with my Bill 202, School (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Act, 1995.

Mr. Speaker, as you will have noticed, my first two Bills are health care related and education related. That emphasizes the importance and the priority we are placing upon those two very, very critical issue areas, issue areas that have been neglected by this government in its single-minded obsession with balancing the budget, not understanding that in fact a great government balances a budget and at the same time finds a way to provide quality, world-class education and quality, secure health care. It's as though this government doesn't understand that it might just be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. There's plenty of evidence that they're not capable of doing that. The people of this province did not hire this government simply to balance the budget. They hired this government to balance the budget and to provide among other things quality education.

Early childhood education has been cut by \$25 million by this government, this Premier and this Minister of Education. It means that we have a patchwork, a multi-tiered kindergarten system in this province ranging from 400 hours in some places down to no hours for those children in some jurisdictions in this province who have families who don't have the money and can't afford to provide them with early childhood education, kindergarten.

Early childhood occupies a distinct and identifiable stage in a child's development. It is not just preparation for what is to come; it has an essential quality in that it is in many respects life itself. There appears to be a false notion in Alberta Education and within government itself that kindergarten is, at best, preparation for grade 1 and, at worst, a highly priced babysitting service. That is the most appalling description or attitude that this government and its members sometimes express towards this kind of service. That thinking has led me to see the need for this Bill.

Kindergarten helps create an environment where instruction is drawn from children. They are helped to grow as thinkers, knowledge builders, and inquirers. They are urged to take action as problem solvers. Any notion that somehow kindergarten should simply be viewed as pregrade 1 or treated in any way like that limits one's perspective on what it has to offer our children and our society and is in many respects anathema.

I would like to point out that one of the most important issues that this Bill addresses and kindergarten more generally addresses is the question of equality of opportunity in our province for our young people. We are Liberals. We believe fundamentally in equality of opportunity. We believe that most Albertans believe in equality of opportunity. In fact, it is one of the strongest values held by Albertans. Well, I know one thing for sure: you

can never have equality of opportunity if you don't have a strong, broadly based public education system. Kindergarten has long played a fundamental, valuable role in that public education system, particularly for disadvantaged children. Right now, as I said earlier, we are seeing a system of kindergarten that is really an affront to equality of opportunity because we have a patchwork of kindergarten services across this province.

Perhaps what is most abhorrent about that patchwork is that there are literally children in this province who are not receiving kindergarten instruction because their parents do not have the money. Ironically and unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it is probably those children who most need early childhood education. Whether a child receives no early childhood education or 400 hours of early childhood education per year is largely dependent upon where they live in this province and how much money his or her parents happen to have. User fees have sprung up in conjunction with this patchwork program, user fees that this government wants to say over and over again are not taxes. Well, when you're a five year old and your parents cannot afford to send you to kindergarten because they don't have the money, I would argue that that is a tax. The fact of the matter is that young families face user fees of anywhere from zero dollars in some jurisdictions, those that have scraped and found the money somehow and probably reduced educational opportunities elsewhere, to \$550 for a 400-hour program in some jurisdictions in this province.

No one can guarantee what an individual does with his or her life, nor should we ever want to guarantee equality of result or equality of outcome, absolutely not. But you will never get equality of opportunity for each and every one of the children in this province, and you will never provide them with an equal opportunity to learn, to succeed, and to make the most of his or her God-given talents if they do not have a chance at early childhood education that is afforded to other children in this province.

Early testing and intervention for children needing help is another feature of establishing equality of opportunity, Mr. Speaker. Enrollment in kindergarten, very importantly and significantly, allows for medical and social problems and learning disorders to be caught at an early age so that treatment or corrective action can be taken to correct or ameliorate that condition. Early diagnosis or recognition of a problem and early intervention can ensure that a child is better prepared and better able to succeed when he or she enters grade 1. For many disorders the earlier the recognition and the intervention the higher the success rate in correcting that disorder. What is at stake here is that the \$25 million that this government is saving – and I can see the members here, because they're each responsible for it – in very significant terms is going to be establishing costs in the lives of children that many of them may literally never recover from.

I would like to emphasize some of the functions of early childhood education in a child's development. First of all and perhaps most importantly, it assists children in developing potential language capability. That is an extremely important skill for children to be successful and capable in their lives and for them to develop their talents.

By the time children begin grade 1, it's very clear, Mr. Speaker, that variations in oral language vocabulary and comprehension can be so great that it is very difficult for teachers to narrow the distance between children who are more and less ready to learn in a formal setting. Not only will the children who haven't had early childhood instruction, kindergarten, be disadvantaged, but they in turn will begin to create a pressure and a

stress within grade 1 classrooms that will cause other children to be disadvantaged, because they will attract more and more of a teacher's time and resources in grade 1 and beyond.

It's also true that children identified in grade 1 as having a poor prognosis for school success all too often do become unsuccessful students and eventual school failures. These school failures, Mr. Speaker, are just one of the groups in our society that this government blames for a particular facet of its unbalanced budgets. It's that they don't work hard enough, that they drop out, that they don't get good jobs, that they want to go four years, Mr. Speaker. They want a fourth year in high school. Isn't that just a burden on the educational system? It's always that they find somebody to blame for the excesses that they perpetrated on this province over the last 24 years.

It's also true, Mr. Speaker, that effective school readiness programs are known to make a substantial difference in children's ability to benefit from compulsory education in grade 1 at age six. These are empirically proven and sustainable observations that somehow are lost upon this government and, most remarkably, are lost on the Minister of Education, who happens to have been an educator and in fact a president of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

2:50

MR. N. TAYLOR: Oh, I wouldn't believe that. That's hard to believe.

MR. MITCHELL: It's hard to believe. It's extremely hard to believe.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that early education assists children in developing understanding powers, in developing reasoning powers, and in developing their imagination and their creativity. If there is a skill that our children have that children who are trained in other educational systems in some parts of the world don't, it is that we emphasize, support, and enhance children's creativity and productivity, which is an essential quality, I believe, for our economic success, for their economic success in the future in an increasingly harsh, globally competitive economy.

I would like to point out also, Mr. Speaker, that we should put a great emphasis on assessing kindergarten in its role in the socialization process for young people in imparting values, in establishing them with lifelong skills that will be developed and nurtured, starting with kindergarten education. Kindergarten at that level in early education assists children in learning how to balance self-interests with the interests of others. Some days we only have to look across this way and understand that probably far too few of these Conservatives ever learned how to balance self-interests against the interests of other people. It assists them to learn to live with other people, to understand other people, to appreciate the strengths of other people, and it also assists them in reinforcing social goals of home and community, values that are essential and are part of our social fabric. It teaches children basic social skills: how to share, how to listen, how to take turns. It teaches children respect toward teachers, respect toward other people's property. It teaches children – and this is very important – tolerance. It exposes children to other children different from themselves and from different backgrounds. It also exposes children to the concept of a disciplined routine, one that assists them when they enter more advanced educational opportunities or structured educational opportunities, beginning with grade 1.

I'd like to point out also that there are some very important features of kindergarten, early childhood education, with respect to the stimulation that children receive while they are in kinder-

garten, and in doing so, they learn a variety of attitudes, skills, and behaviours. They also learn to deal with a range of symbols. They learn to express themselves. Their curiosity is nurtured. They find a wide-ranging degree of exploration of self and of their environment.

What is particularly most galling about the cuts to early childhood education by this government, Mr. Speaker, is that it is so out of sync with what the rest of the world is doing. Provincial governments across this country are not reducing their commitment to kindergarten; they are increasing their commitment to kindergarten. If we look internationally and we talk about the real Alberta advantage, it's not going to be whether the Treasurer can add. It's going to be in large part realized through the education or the reinvesting in our young people in particular. One need look no further than Japan, a small island with few natural resources, certainly not blessed in any way, shape, or form with the level of natural resources that we have. Japan as well as many newly industrialized countries has few natural resources. As a result, its strategy has always been to invest in its people to overcome obstacles like that lack of natural resources and like distance from western markets, which could make it less competitive. Japan has educated, has invested in its people, and it has been able to work extremely effectively in overcoming obstacles.

We must invest in our young people, and I don't want to reduce it strictly to economic terms, Mr. Speaker. It is a fact that it has economic implications, this kind of education. It also has simply human implications for the quality of life that these young people can expect to enjoy, the productivity that they will enjoy in their lives as they age and contribute to our society.

Another one of the most galling observations, I think, that we feel on this side of the House when we look at the cuts to kindergarten is what it reflects in the kinds of choices that this government has made and its inability to structure priorities that reflect the values of Albertans. The fact is that Albertans do value education. Albertans who have young children value education fervently, Mr. Speaker. I happen to have a young child in kindergarten. I have had two sons before this third son in kindergarten, and I know personally what a tremendous advantage it is for those children, for my children. The fact of the matter is that Albertans widely hold the view that equality of opportunity is an essential value in our society and that cuts to kindergarten funding are an affront to that value.

What has this government achieved instead of \$25 million worth of kindergarten funding? Well, they've just put \$21 million, Mr. Speaker, into more paving. As he was described not two years ago by one of his caucus colleagues, he is in fact a paving Premier. He proved it yesterday in that budget: \$21 million to pave more roads to buy who knows how many Tory votes – they come expensive – and who knows how many Tory ridings, and no \$25 million, on the other hand, for kindergarten. We're still seeing this government put more money into grants to business. As though they haven't learned the one lesson that they've taught everybody else in the last 24 years: this government can only pick losers, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that they continue to hang on to the heritage savings trust fund and throw away \$280 million in interest rate differential while they're taking \$25 million out of grants to kindergarten. The fact of the matter is that they have increased funding for foreign offices. The fact of the matter is that they have four ADMs in FIGA earning \$97,000 a year managing 23 managers earning \$70,000 a year managing 44 people earning an average of about \$42,000 a year.

My point is that a responsible government makes reasonable priority selections and makes responsible choices. If ever there was an irresponsible choice on the part of this Premier, this

Minister of Education, and every one of these members, it is that they have taken \$25 million out of kindergarten, thrown that system into disarray, and damaged the potential for many young people's futures in this province. I ask that these members look beyond their narrow, ideological, partisan ends and vote with their consciences in support of this Bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 202, as we know, raises an important and emotional issue: the education of our children. I'm aware that Albertans are concerned that their children be provided with adequate and appropriate ECS programs if they so choose.

I'd like to clarify a number of the questions that my constituents asked me with respect to this question, and I have a number of points that I would like to speak to in opposition to Bill 202. First, I'd like to take this opportunity to call attention back to a question that I asked the hon. Minister of Education last week concerning the increase in ECS funding. I'd like to again make it clear that while overall ECS funding has increased by 20 percent, ECS per student funding is up by 43 percent, from \$585 per child to \$850 per child. This funding provides for the cost of the basic ECS program including instructional salaries and benefits, plant operations and maintenance, administration, learning resources, furnishings, equipment, and transportation.

Now, school boards and private operators, however, do not necessarily need to use the funding for these particular purposes. If, for example, the kindergarten operator chooses to use the transportation funding to increase the number of kindergarten program hours, then they're perfectly welcome and free to do so, and it seems that some boards, in fact both Edmonton boards, have done just that.

3:00

I read in this morning's *Calgary Herald*, February 22, the headline that says, "Full-time ECS fees won't go up." Well, isn't that big of them? It's really interesting that that should come from a board that in 1993-94 cut support within the classroom by \$5 million but at the same time raised its own system administration by \$5 million. Isn't it big of them that they won't increase the ECS fees? Well, perhaps we should start looking at doing some management audits to see who's really on the program.

Kindergarten operators have other options with which to extend the ECS programs. They can use school board funds either from provincially generated revenues or the Alberta school foundation fund, they can use a special tax levy, or any combination of those options, but only as a last resort, Mr. Speaker, should they introduce user fees. Why is it that some boards who seem to be on the program can fully fund up to 400 hours of ECS without user fees and some boards can't?

Mr. Speaker, the whole issue surrounding kindergarten is one of flexibility. It has always been a program where local communities offer programs according to their wishes. From the time that early childhood services was introduced in this province, there has been flexibility to meet needs according to local priorities. Albertans like the fact that ECS offers that flexibility.

That brings me to my next point. Since kindergarten programming began, each school jurisdiction had their own ideas about the kind of program they would offer their students. If we think back to what we had before regionalization and amalgamation, we had at least 141 boards that were offering ECS programs, and you can

just about imagine that there were 141 different methods of delivering ECS. Perhaps you could even expand that. You know, there are 1,800 schools in the system. So were there 1,800 different ECS programs? Well, even 141 is too many. Somehow during the course of the last few months it seems to have been implied that the variety of ECS programs just came about with the change in government funding. Well, our ECS programs have always reflected a diversity of kindergarten programs throughout this province.

We constantly hear arguments with respect to studies and literature with respect to ECS, and we're told that they all point to greater funding and a greater number of hours. In fact, we keep hearing in this House day after day after day that we should fund a minimum of 400 hours. That's really, in essence, part of what this Bill is trying to do. It's really interesting when you look at the ECS system that we had in this province. You know, no one's ever done a study of 141 different ECS programs running in the same province. The literature is not in fact pointing to the kind of ECS system that we have in this province, so you can't rely on the literature that essentially does a study of a particular system over another to in fact support the argument for 400 hours of ECS. The studies which have been conducted do not take into account the flexibility that exists in our province. What research is able to tell us, however, is that the emphasis should be put on the quality of the program itself. The nature of the program and the way it is structured and delivered are the most important factors. Research also indicates that kindergarten programs are of definite benefit to children with higher needs.

Mr. Speaker, both of these issues have been addressed by this government. The Department of Education has already undertaken initiatives to ensure the quality of the kindergarten program. The Draft Kindergarten Program Statement, for example, demonstrates that this government is concerned about the quality of instruction that our very young Albertans receive. The draft program statement mentions that

what young children learn at this stage will have a major impact on successful learning experiences in school, on personal development and on future participation in society.

As such, this government has outlined learning expectations designed to set clear goals for our kindergarten program.

That is a situation that brings me to another question. Every time that you hear these statements made in the House with respect to 400 hours, 400 hours, 400 hours – you know, you hear it day after day after day. I fail to understand why this particular Bill doesn't talk about learner expectations. It doesn't talk about clear goals with respect to a kindergarten program. It doesn't talk about anything measurable at all. What it says is that it's automatic that you should have 400 hours. Of what? Four hundred hours of learning how to get along with the other children, the social skills: is that what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is talking about? Is it 400 hours of learning the alphabet? Is that what this hon. member wants in the ECS program? I fail to understand why it is that everybody wants 400 hours. Of what? There are no measurable programs or goals in this particular Bill, and I can't support it.

This government has not taken their responsibility to ECS children and thus all of society lightly. The new program statement is designed to set out clear expectations for our ECS children. With these learning expectations we can make sure that kindergarten students are getting what they need out of ECS.

The Draft Kindergarten Program Statement sets out five learning expectations:

- Communication: Literacy and Numeracy
- Community and Environmental Awareness
- Creative and Cultural Expression
- Physical Skills and Well-being
- Personal and Social Responsibility.

Now, that is something that is measurable, Mr. Speaker. These skills will provide our children with the foundation they need to enter grade 1. If these expectations are not being met, the flexibility exists to change the program accordingly so that when you look at the measurements you see how you're doing and you make the adjustments.

As for the research which indicates the importance of ECS to students with special learning needs, the government has already demonstrated its commitment to Alberta children who fit this category. Programs are in place to aid children with disabilities and children with socioeconomic disadvantages. Funds for program enhancement projects, special-needs programs, program units, and special transportation are available for Alberta's special-needs children. Program enhancement project funding permits ECS operators to offer programs and services for economically disadvantaged children. Mildly or moderately disabled students receive \$1,360 per child, and our children with severe disabilities receive even greater funding. The message here is this: those children most benefiting from ECS programs are having their needs met.

Finally, I would like to point out that it's not just the responsibility of the Department of Education to see to it that our children are prepared to make the transition from home to school. It requires a concerted effort involving parents, families, and communities. The draft kindergarten program states that young children learn the skills necessary for entering grade 1 in a number of environments: "in their homes, in kindergarten programs, in day care programs and in community activities." The program statement also supports and recognizes that the children's first and most important teachers are their parents. My point is that ECS provides only part of the learning package necessary for making the transition from home to school. It's up to us parents, families, and community members to do our part in ensuring the well-being and success of our children.

3:10

To conclude, I want to make it very clear that this government is committed to Alberta's children, and the kindergarten program that is being offered will adequately meet their needs. I cannot therefore support Bill 202. Our communities have the ability to offer programs consistent with local wishes, and every child in Alberta will have access to a minimum of 240 hours of ECS installation of measurable outcome.

Finally, flexibility has traditionally been and should continue to be one of the key characteristics of our kindergarten program. If I look at Bill 202, I find it really interesting.

Fund for the purpose of funding an early childhood services program regardless of the maximum number of hours established by a board for that program.

If we look at the possibility that exists here without anything of substance in this Bill, there's nothing here to vote for. What they're saying is that we have to fund it no matter what the board wants. So perhaps we'll go to the Ontario model where they want kids to start in grade 3, and they're talking about funding 800 hours. Well, Mr. Speaker, what we fund here is what is measurable and what is of benefit to the children of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps if the hon. member had attended kindergarten, he would understand the word "measurable" and what it means.

Mr. Speaker, I don't intend to use the time here to berate the good works of locally elected officials, whether it be the Calgary public school board or my own Edmonton public school board, such as the hon. member before me has done, but I will challenge the hon. member in his statement about not being emotional and looking at just the facts. Well, let's look at the facts, but let's also be emotional about the education of our children. There is nothing more important, there is nothing that cries for more emotion than our young children and the quality education of those young children.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take people back a few years in this province under the leadership of then Premier Lougheed who commissioned a report on educational planning, and I'd like to just briefly quote from that report, which has previously been tabled in this Legislature. This was back in 1972. The report said:

While several Canadian provinces have high participation rates in pre-school programs, Alberta remains the only one without established plans for publicly-supported endeavors at this level. Yet overwhelming support for such an undertaking was found by the Commission during its hearings. Time and time again, this issue was the subject of agreement between private citizens and professional educators alike. In fact, no other single topic was as often discussed with such a high degree of accord.

I'm moving on in the document.

The development of early education in Alberta must reach beyond imported traditions and look forward to the future needs of our own children.

Wally Worth headed up this commission which wrote this report along with others, the president emeritus from the University of Alberta, Dr. Horowitz, and the Education minister at the time, who was in this Legislature yesterday, Lou Hyndman. After this report they pushed very strongly for full public funding for early childhood services because they knew that's where the future of Alberta lay.

Mr. Speaker, the research is very clear. The hon. member alluded to the Ontario report. The Ontario report cites literature and studies, contrary to what the hon. member has stated, that do not specifically look at one particular model but look at a variety of models and in fact generically look at preschool education. It's very, very clear, and I quote from the report For the Love of Learning. I would just like, as an addendum, to indicate that it was co-chaired by Monique Bégin, who's done great work in this country as the author of the Canada Health Act and who now provides further leadership to us right across this country. In her report she says that there is evidence in the 1983 data from France looking at preschool education in a variety of models, that being my editorial, the quote being: the 1983 data from France indicates that with each year of preschool – one, two, or the maximum of three – the number of children who are required to repeat grade 1 decreases, and this is true regardless of the parents' occupations. The report goes further and cites studies that look at achievement, measurable achievement, in grade 6 and even into high school.

Albertans have spoken loud and clear. We know that the government caucus wrangled with this issue. We know that there was dissension in the ranks. We know that a very slim majority of the government caucus members voted in favour of the policy to cut early childhood education by 55 percent and tinker as the government might with a tidbit here of a little bit of an increase

or another little bit of an increase here. The fact of the matter is that we have had dramatic decreases over the last two years in funding to early childhood services, which was already, in terms of comparison with other provinces, at the bottom of the heap. Of all those provinces, of nine other provinces in Canada, we now fund early childhood services the least. Mr. Speaker, this is a national shame for Alberta. It is not consistent with what Albertans have said over and over and over again, which is: our single highest priority must be the children. I challenge the government members, those in this Legislature today and all those who aren't able to be here, to exercise a free vote and stand up for their constituents who have called upon them to reinstate the 400-hour program. Many of the government members know it was a bad decision, and I put it to you, Mr. Speaker. It takes a lot of courage. It takes a tremendous lot of courage, but I encourage those members to stand up and speak for their conscience and speak for what their constituents have told them.

The Kindergarten Coalition has indeed done a survey of parents from a variety of jurisdictions, and I'll tell you what their survey said. This was a survey by questionnaire. Ninety-three percent – count them, Mr. Speaker, 93 percent – of parents said that they wanted a 400-hour mandatory, fully funded ECS program. Ten percent went further and said that we should have a 400-hour mandated program plus a prekindergarten program. Only 2.9 percent of the respondents said that we should have a minimum 200-hour program, and only .17 percent said that we should eliminate ECS altogether in terms of public funding.

Mr. Speaker, this side of the Legislature last year and this year submitted several tens of thousands of names on petitions calling for reinstatement of full funding for kindergarten in this province. When every other country in the industrial world is putting more effort and more energy into preschool education, Albertans are calling for . . . [interjection] I'll tell you where I'd get the money from. I'd cut the Treasurer's budget for his department and his office right away. I would cut travel. I would cut the kinds of decisions that this Treasurer makes in terms of the expenses that he personally approves. I would have renegotiated the Bovar agreement that allows this government to use public money to subsidize private interests.

Moving on, I believe our job in this Legislature is to speak for the people of Alberta.

MR. DINNING: We should move on.

MR. HENRY: Yes, move on instead of backwards, Mr. Treasurer. We will move on, and regardless of how far backwards this government intends to take us, this side of the House will push us to move on and move forward for Albertans and not move backwards in time.

Mr. Speaker, comments from parents, if I may, from the questionnaire that I just quoted from. One parent said:

I feel it should be mandatory for the sake of our children so that in future years it will become rewarding. There should be no advantages for higher income parents, who could afford to send their children, over the lower income families. Each child is their own individual, and no one has a right to take that away from any of them.

One parent said:

My daughter was not in the learning mode prior to kindergarten, not due to our efforts. She was not interested in anything. We would sit down with her and do alphabets, read, numbers, et cetera, but to no avail. But since she has started kindergarten, she has flourished wonderfully. She takes the initiative now and enjoys every aspect of kindergarten. She had been in playschool prior to kindergarten, which was rewarding in the sense of

development through play and interaction with other children. Kindergarten provides a more structured atmosphere for learning and development. Our daughter has progressed with great interest.

Contrary to what the Member for Calgary-Egmont might think, kindergarten is more than just socialization, more than just getting along, although that is very much a component of kindergarten.

3:20

There are many other members who want to speak. Albertans have spoken loud and clear. If I may, I'd like to quote my five-year-old daughter. When she was aware that her cousin in Ontario was not only attending kindergarten but attending junior kindergarten, she asked why we couldn't do that here. I explained to her that here, even in our province where we work and live, some children don't have as much kindergarten as she has because the government and the Legislature, where her father works, chose not to make sure there was enough money for that. She looked up at me, and she said: "Daddy, but this is all Canada. It should all be the same for everybody. That isn't fair that it's different for different children." Mr. Speaker, out of the mouths of babes comes the truth, and I leave my words at that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 202 raises an issue which is of utmost importance to all Albertans. Albertans want the needs of their children to be met, and they want to ensure that their children have access to all advantages equal to them. But I want to point out that all Alberta children will be entitled to 240 hours of kindergarten in '95-96. Our children are being taken care of. This is not a debate on whether or not there should be kindergarten. It's not a debate on whether or not kindergarten is important or not important, which is what we've heard from across the way. This is a debate about how many hours of kindergarten should be provided.

I have heard the members opposite tell me that children who don't attend ECS classes are going to run into trouble with the law. They're going to become prostitutes. They're going to develop addictions. Mr. Speaker, these are claims I cannot accept. There have been decent, high-achieving people who've come out of grade 12 even without ECS.

Last fall one of my parent groups asked why they didn't have the right to decide that 200 hours of ECS was all they wished. They weren't given that choice. They were told they had 400 hours or nothing. The choice was taken away from the parents.

Bill 202 raises a number of issues, but I'd really like to just focus my comments on one of these issues, and that is the clause which would legislate that all ECS programs would have to be offered for a minimum of 400 hours. Mr. Speaker, when this government released its new funding framework, the early childhood services program was increased from 200 hours to 240 hours. Per child funding was increased from \$595 to \$850. This basic program is available to all children without tuition fees. Two hundred and forty hours of funding will allow school boards and private operators to provide an ECS program that meets the learning needs of Alberta's children. It meets the learning expectations established in the new ECS program handbook developed by Alberta Education. I'll be the first to admit that no one really knows for sure how many hours of kindergarten are needed to properly prepare children for the transition from home to school, and as we've all heard a number of times, research is inconclusive on a long-term benefit of kindergarten programming. It's difficult to tell the extent of the benefits of a kindergarten

program in the long run. It seems logical that a shorter program would be offered to meet the needs of young Albertans. Funding 400 hours of kindergarten in these times of fiscal restraint is more than questionable. When Alberta is doing its utmost to balance the budget, I don't think it's out of the question to reduce funding in areas where the benefits of the program are shown to be inconclusive.

In saying that, however, I want to point out that I believe strongly in the importance of providing kindergarten programs. I really feel, though, that a 240-hour program does provide the necessary service needed by our children. I do not believe that 400 hours are required in order to allow the children to be comfortable in their new social atmosphere. The basic purpose of kindergarten is to help our children become comfortable socially as well as physically in the school setting. This, in my opinion, is the goal that must be met as our children begin school. I believe this can be accomplished in 240 hours.

I have reviewed the draft guidelines for the proposed 240-hour ECS program and found them to be very comprehensive. All areas of the child's development are addressed, and these needs can be met in the 240 hours. I would also like to point out that nothing is written in stone. The government has already proven that it's closely monitoring the effects of a spending reduction, and if spending reductions are seen as too severe in any area, they'll be reconsidered and a new solution will be sought. The Premier has said that this government will listen and will respond. I believe the same is true as far as kindergarten is concerned.

As it stands right now, I am not at all convinced that the 240 hours of kindergarten instruction are inadequate for the children. There is, of course, an exception to this rule, Mr. Speaker. Those children who come from deprived homes may very well need more time and more funding in a kindergarten program, as my colleague from Calgary-Egmont has mentioned. There are many options open for those children. There are excellent community programs operated by parents and volunteers and community members for very little cost, and the government provides increased funding for the children who need that help. Disadvantaged children are being taken care of.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer is rising on a point of order?

MR. DINNING: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Might the member take a question?

THE SPEAKER: Will the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow permit a question from the hon. Provincial Treasurer?

MRS. LAING: Yes.

Debate Continued

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the member is speaking from what I believe is a rather informed background in this area. Might she advise the members of the Assembly just the professional background with which she brings these informed remarks to the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have my bachelor of education and 26 years of elementary teaching experience.

MRS. LAING: There are also options available to all the families who want to supplement their child's kindergarten program. Again there are a number of community groups, private operators, playschools, and other groups and activities that children may attend. As well, if the program is being provided by a school board, the school boards have the opportunity to provide the ECS program beyond the basic 240-hour program. They have the ability to fund the extra programs through other school board funds, fees, special tax levy funding, or a combination of the three. Mr. Speaker, even if Albertans feel that 240 hours is not enough, they do have other options at their disposal.

Prior to 1973 existing kindergartens did not receive provincial support. Kindergartens were privately operated and community based. The importance of parent involvement in decision-making and class planning was absolutely essential to the success of the program. Now, 22 years later, it seems as though kindergarten is moving away from its roots in the community. School boards who provide kindergarten programs have formalized the kindergarten process and restructured it in a way that is more convenient for the board. I think it's important that Albertans are aware of the roots of the program so that they can better understand the true nature of the kindergarten program. It's always been up to the parents to determine the importance of the kindergarten program for their own child, and I don't think that should change.

Mr. Speaker, I was involved in the school system of Nova Scotia for a number of years. I think their system of primary school is useful to consider when arguing the number of hours required for a productive kindergarten program. In Nova Scotia their primary school, or kindergarten program, basically consisted of two parts. For the first half of the year, five months, the children take part in a fairly traditional kindergarten program. There is a big emphasis on learning through play and socializing. In the second aspect of the program children are involved in core curriculum programs which are consistent with grade 1. They take courses in language arts, mathematics, art, health, physical education, music, science, and social studies. It therefore seems to me that Nova Scotia only provides their students with a full ECS program in half the time. The first part of the year they feel their students are ready to begin tackling the provincial curriculum. The remainder of the year is actually quite similar to grade 1. The difference between Nova Scotia and Alberta is that for all intents and purposes Nova Scotia students start grade 1 at an even earlier year.

3:30

The hon. opposition leader mentioned early intervention. Early intervention for children is very possible with 240 hours. The same specialists are around. The same services are available. Children can be tested, and should they need remediation or rehabilitative services, those are available. Two hundred and forty hours does not mean that those services are not there. For instance, in my own constituency the health unit has an intervention program that actually begins with the newborn. The public health nurses go to the home and meet the family. They can assess the family informally, and if they feel that there's a concern in parenting skills, they are referred to a program called Nobody's Perfect. This is run by volunteers, and they are donated a room in the school. It has been very successful. That starts with the newborn, not at age 5.

To conclude, I want to again state my opposition to Bill 202. Two hundred and forty hours will meet the basic needs of our children. The goal of kindergarten, to ease the transition from home to school, will be achieved. Early intervention is possible

with the 240 hours; however, if the parents or community feel that they would like to increase the number of hours, there are still several options available to them.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's kindergarten children are being adequately cared for. The kindergarten program is in place for 1995-96 to comply with the new program statement and has the future of our young Albertans in mind. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very much aware of the educational background of the Member for Calgary-Bow, and I was therefore absolutely and utterly shocked when she pronounced herself against this Bill. I can only believe that this is ample evidence that in that caucus there is no room for free speech or free votes whatsoever.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MS LEIBOVICI: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is rising on a point of order?

MS LEIBOVICI: Yes. If I could ask the hon. member a question, please.

THE SPEAKER: Well, if he'll accept it. Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, will you accept the question?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to accept that question.

Debate Continued

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I'm going to pre-empt my colleague, and I'm going to pre-empt the Treasurer in case he wants to butt in, and I'm going to state that I've been an educator for 26 years. To a large extent it is for that reason that I see perfectly well the merits of this particular Bill and the need to increase the ECS program to 400 hours. I should point out while speaking about educational backgrounds that I once attempted to teach a kindergarten class. Mr. Speaker, my attempt lasted about one day, after which I went home with a tremendous headache. I think those people deserve twice the amount of pay that they're getting, in fact, for all the work they're doing.

Getting back to this Bill, Mr. Speaker, it probably comes as no surprise, not even to the Treasurer, that I speak in favour of this Bill. It is really almost beyond belief that we're debating a Bill that proposes to raise the number of hours of ECS programming to 400 hours from 240. I think it's worth while reflecting on the fact that only one year ago ECS programs ran for 400 hours. We're attempting to get back to where we were last year and before. So much for the sort of progress that we're getting out of this so-called Progressive Conservative government. Perhaps they could consider changing the name to Regressive Conservative or something of that nature. They might even think about reaching far back in the gray past to restoring the index and the inquisition and things of that nature. After all, several members have publicly proclaimed that certain books ought to be banned. Perhaps they would like to go back to the time when nobody could read and write, other than those in power of course.

Mr. Speaker, we want to restore the ECS program to 400 hours as a minimum. It is really astonishing that we are aiming at these 400 hours when a province like Ontario is seriously looking at 800 hours. At the same time, the province of Newfoundland is talking about an increase from 400 to somewhere around 600 hours per student per year – just imagine this – Newfoundland, supposedly our poor cousins. In other words, everywhere in Canada other than in P.E.I., where they haven't seen the light yet, the kindergarten program runs at 400 hours or more, and it's going up.

When we move to western Europe, Mr. Speaker, with which I am somewhat familiar, we find programs of 800 hours or more mandatory. Perhaps I should stick in here the fact that at a very young age I attended two years of compulsory kindergarten in a very small country named Holland. Now, this was in 1940 and '41, in case some people are guessing: in those days two years of mandated kindergarten programs. Here we are talking about an increase from 240 hours to 400. Sometimes I do think we are behind the times.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, this government stands out clearly like the proverbial sore thumb in the developed world as the only government to reduce its ECS program. This puts us clearly on par with such noted places of civilization like Zimbabwe and Angola, who haven't quite reached the stage of wealth that we have here.

I'd like to quote from the Premier's statement when he was sworn in on December 14, 1992. He said, and I quote: we will educate our children, care for the seniors, and heal the sick, et cetera. Just over a year later, of course, he decided to start chipping away at these promises. When he went on his very first fireside chat, which was a little over a year ago, he went to tell Albertans that we would have to be facing the short pain for the long gain. Then the next day it fell to the ministers, in this particular case the Minister of Education, to be far more explicit in the description of the pain. That, of course, was the moment when the funding for the ECS program was cut to only 200 hours, a cut of 54 percent. Now, surely that was an indication of where the government thought ECS ranked as a priority. It was clearly considered a frill, and once again they proved themselves to be vastly out of step with anyone in the civilized world.

It was about 30 years ago when the Worth report indicated that the government should fund a 400-hour ECS program. By the way, of course, Mr. Worth was a very good member of the Liberal Party and still is. The PC government of the day, Mr. Speaker, adopted his recommendation to their everlasting credit. Amazing. They had the foresight that is clearly lacking these days. They recognized the importance of the provision of a level playing field for all young kids.

By the way, in I think it was 1987 Alberta Education reorganized, and early childhood services were merged with Alberta Education to ensure continuity of learning from kindergarten to grade 1. At the same time, teachers in grade 1 and up to grade 3 were required to have a special certificate in early childhood studies. That's important to keep these things in mind. In those days clearly it was deemed to be very important. Then some 23 years later, namely now, a subsequent PC government is trying to undo most of that. It stuns Albertans with the announcement of a 54 percent cut. Now, the amazing thing is that we keep hearing that the silent majority came up with that particular direction. I guess it's a classic case of the silent majority all of a sudden starting to speak, but that's not what we heard at the roundtables which we attended. No one – absolutely no one – made that recommendation to cut the ECS program in half. So where they

got it, I'm not sure, but clearly it was inspired by economic reasons.

3:40

Now, we pressed the Minister of Education for an explanation. Mr. Speaker, we did our best. I'm pleased to see that he's listening attentively. What we got was a wide-ranging dissertation that probably can be best described as nincompooian, because it didn't tell us anything. But supposedly he introduced and tabled a whole series of articles that backed up his claim. I think it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1,001 articles. That was an amazing thing. I've got some here, by the way, because I was really struck by the minister having dug all these up, and of course he's gone through them. The amazing thing is that none of these articles speak to a direct comparison of the merits between a 200- and 400-hour program.

I could read you a whole bunch of titles, but let me just read you one here, and the minister of course remembers it. It's called *Langsschnittliche Analyse von Entwicklungsmerkmalen der Geschlechtsypisierung im Kindersalter*. I didn't know that the minister spoke German, but it's here. Just in case some people don't understand this, this has to do with a longitudinal analysis of sex-role stereotyping in four- to 10-year-old children. It has little bearing on the topic at hand.

Nevertheless, the minister tried his darndest, and I don't know why he attempted to, dare I say, snow us. Why not? The amazing thing is, though, that the Minister of Justice at about that time was quoted as saying in the Canmore paper that that evidence in fact did not exist. I found that interesting. Perhaps he was the only one who had the intestinal fortitude to make that admission. They were fascinating articles, nevertheless, and I suggest that you take a look at it, members.

A few months ago he announced, amazingly enough again – here is the minister – that funds were sprung for an additional 40 hours. Now, I found that very interesting. Clearly, a year ago it was deemed that 200 hours were enough, and now all of a sudden we hear that it must really be 240, because only that is the correct number. I think the Member for Calgary-Bow was saying that we can't really determine the correct number of hours, but she, too, felt that 240 was enough all of a sudden, and she felt that that was an indication of the Premier listening to what Albertans had to say. Well, I'll have you know that Albertans have not said: we want 240 hours. They've said: we want 400 hours. We've got some 200,000 signatures and letters to prove that.

Then, just in case anyone really wants to know anything about a study, there is Perry's Preschool Study in Michigan, which clearly shows the value of kindergarten. It's interesting. They did a longitudinal study where they followed 24 students, and apparently it proved conclusively that these people were far less prone to get into crime, to get divorced. They had higher incomes and so on and so forth. Now, that is a study, Mr. Speaker, that clearly has a bearing on the subject, unlike the study of the *Langsschnittliche Analyse*.

So here we have the strange phenomenon of the government on the one hand holding forth on the need to toughen our laws. Last spring we heard cries of hang 'em high and shoot 'em to death in relation to the young offenders, and everybody was manfully insisting on tougher laws. On the other hand, they cut ECS in half thereby probably increasing the likelihood of certain kids in the future lapsing into a life of crime.

What's even more pathetic, I think, Mr. Speaker, is that the deficit reduction was of course the real reason for the government's decision to make this drastic cut. Of course, the deficit and debt reductions need to take place so as not to saddle our kids

with an unfair debt load. I agree with that, but it seems to me that by cutting the ECS program in half, in fact what we're doing is saddling kids with a different load and still unfair, a load that gives them an unequal start to education, because obviously the kids of lower income families will not end up going to take the full program, whereas the kids of parents who can afford it are doing so: clearly a two-tiered ECS program.

So the much vaunted level playing field is suddenly less level, especially for children at risk vis-à-vis their peers in other provinces. It's ironic again that at a time when the government keeps talking about the need for global competition – we need to be able to compete globally; there is that hackneyed phrase – they're going to cut off our kids' education at the knees, so to speak. It doesn't really make any sense. Also, within the province, of course, because of the two-tiered system, the playing field is less than level. Now, is that, then, part of the Alberta advantage: half a kindergarten program or a two-tiered one in some places? Does the government not realize that people tend to not move to or invest in Alberta only because of low taxes? Surely there's more to life than low taxes and hidden fees.

They know, of course, about the low taxes, but even more importantly they know that we have an ECS program that is clearly behind the times. They're looking for the right environment in education, culture, and recreation as well as health care and environment and so on. When they look at Alberta, they're beginning to spot shortcomings on all these fronts. We have government members who are advocating the banning of books, as I mentioned earlier, and that does not entice any freethinking people. We've got members here who appoint themselves arbiters of taste in the arts. They propose to ban certain pieces of art. In health care we perceive the ever widening cracks here in the system, which is not something to entice others. We have a government that sits by idly when our forests are being denuded and the air is being polluted. All in all, the advantage that Alberta has in low taxes is kind of evaporating in light of all the other problems that we have.

Then education of course. Sure it has received the smallest cuts in funding, but the repercussions of cutting ECS, for instance, will be felt for a long time. I think politically too, Mr. Speaker, it was quite simply a dumb move, because it affected our kids, and we don't take kindly to it. I'm speaking on behalf of all Albertans here.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to say to my colleagues on the other side of the House that I think you all know what the correct move is, and that is a move back to 400 hours. I challenge you, therefore, including the Member for Calgary-Bow, to defy the orders of your particular caucus and to vote in favour of this Bill.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with mixed emotions that I rise to speak today on Bill 202. I know that there are some Albertans out there concerned with the reduction of kindergarten hours, but it has always been my opinion that government should provide services which meet the purpose in mind. The days of being able to access basic requirements are no longer feasible in the eyes of this government or in the eyes of Albertans. Two hundred and forty hours will bring our children up to an appropriate level to enter grade 1. If the different operators or school boards choose to offer more kindergarten

program hours, they are more than welcome to do so, but this government is already providing enough funding to offer a basic 240-hour program which will meet the needs of Alberta's children.

I'm also concerned why there's a great need to target the number of hours to what would be or could be perceived as perfect results or even the lack of perfect results. Our economy is not in a position to offer more funding when the basic purpose can be accomplished in less time. Alberta taxpayers are responsible for all Alberta children but only to a certain extent. I feel that once the basic purpose is met, taxpayers' money could be and should be concentrated in areas where perhaps the basics are not yet being met. Part of the process of becoming more efficient is to focus spending on those areas that are essential to meet the needs of the student. The Department of Education believes that the new funding levels will continue to provide boards and private ECS operators with sufficient support to ready children for school.

I know how important kindergarten is to children. The social skills which our young Albertans gain from ECS programs are undeniable. Kindergarten gives our children the opportunity to learn how to interact with other children, and it allows them to gradually enter the school atmosphere. Two hundred and forty hours, however, will sufficiently fulfill these goals.

I also understand that many of Alberta's kindergarten children do not have the same opportunities at home as other students may have. This government has recognized that fact and provides extra funding to Alberta's disabled and to the economically disadvantaged students. A number of programs exist to help those students who will benefit from kindergarten programming the most. Additional funding is provided to ECS programs to meet the needs of special learning children with disadvantages, disabilities, or socioeconomic disadvantages. I think it's important that that need has been recognized.

I want to stress the importance of parents taking the primary responsibility for teaching their own children before and even after – and even after, Mr. Speaker – they reach the school system. By the time our children reach kindergarten, most should already have had at least a basic understanding of the skills they are going to be learning. Attending a kindergarten program should only be a very small part of our children's education. They learn by being stimulated by their parents, by their families, by their friends, and by other activities that they are involved in within their communities. I would like to point out that the overall strength of our families is supported by increasing parental and family involvement.

I'm also concerned about providing more funding to a kindergarten program when there is such a lack of continuity between programs across the province. I believe that our kindergarten programs should achieve their goals in a common manner to ensure that all of our children are reaching the level of education that they deserve. A draft program statement is definitely a step in the right direction, because it outlines a number of goals for kindergarten operators to achieve and it provides them with a method to measure their performance. However, until all operators agree to follow a provincial kindergarten guideline, I would not support 400 hours of ECS funding.

I would also like to refer to the section of Bill 202 which states that

a board may use funds paid to it from the Alberta School Foundation Fund for the purpose of funding an early childhood services program.

I'm not sure of the necessity of including this clause in Bill 202. The Court of Appeal has already stated that nothing in the existing School Act or in the regulation precludes school boards from using ASFF funding for education purposes generally, and that

includes kindergarten programs. The court stated that locally elected school boards are in the best position to evaluate the balance, the conflicting demands for education services from the citizens of the community they serve, and to decide what is best and in the best interests of that community. Because funds may already be transferred, I really have to wonder why this clause is necessary. Would this not be another example of overlegislation?

I have one more point I'd like to make before I conclude. I even made this point in the Legislature before. After spending reductions were announced in other areas of government, doom and gloom was predicted by the members from across the way. Now, months after the cuts have already taken effect, we see that these fears are unfounded. Where the government realized that cuts were too deep, adjustments were made to rectify the problems. In the next couple of years we will look back at the reduction in kindergarten hours and see that again these fears are unfounded. I understand that fear exists. Change rarely occurs without a certain degree of fear and concern, but if this government were frozen by fear each time change was in order, we would not have come remotely as far as we have since the election in June of 1993.

I would again like to state my opposition to Bill 202. Kindergarten is undoubtedly a valuable service to our society. We recognize that. It certainly meets a purpose. It is when it gets beyond simply meeting its purpose that it no longer necessitates increased government funding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would the Assembly give unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
Edmonton-Mill Woods.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Carol Vaage, president of the Early Childhood Education Council and the Kindergarten Coalition president working with other concerned Albertans to be a voice on behalf of young children. Carol is accompanied by Kathryn Horlor, Lynanne Kroetch, Kerri, Megann, and Brendan. They're in the gallery. I'd ask them to stand.

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

Bill 202
School (Early Childhood Services)
Amendment Act, 1995
(*continued*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to continue debate.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to preface my support for the Bill with a couple of comments. One, I think it's really unfortunate that in the 1990s kindergarten has become a political issue. It's not the '60s, and it's quite astound-

ing that we should at this point in our history be debating a Bill such as this.

4:00

The second point I'd like to make is that the Member for Calgary-Bow was absolutely correct in indicating that kindergarten always was seen as and is still a co-operative affair, an affair with home, school, and community, and must, if we're wise, remain that way. There was great debate when kindergartens were instituted, at least in this city, as to how much time young children should be in a kindergarten program, and some of that debate was rather heated. The saw seemed to be 400 hours, and as the Member for Calgary-Bow points out so wisely, 400 hours is probably too much for some children just starting and is not enough for others, but it seems to be a generally agreed upon community standard that we have come to accept.

With those two remarks, I'd like to go back and take a look at some of the history. In 1976 Canada, along with a number of UN partners, signed a covenant that we would move to tax-supported public education past 12th grade to the first, second, third, and into the fourth year of postsecondary education. In England, of course, preschool education begins at three years. I think the signers of that covenant would be quite astounded to find that jurisdictions in Canada today are looking at reducing the number of hours for preschool programs, let alone looking forward to increasing tax support for postsecondary programs.

In this city there were publicly supported kindergartens until 1921, and they were then discontinued. In the late '60s the school board at the time instituted 10 pilot kindergartens, and they were totally funded from local school board funds. That pilot, of course, succeeded, and we went on to universal kindergartens. Universal kindergarten programs were eventually adopted by the entire province.

Again, I find it quite surprising. Having been a member of that board, I know that I was joined with many other members who were looking not only at kindergarten programs – the last presentation I made to the board was one that would have asked that board to move into the area of Head Start, in a limited way initially but hopefully down the road to a universal Head Start program, which would serve the needs of pre-prekindergarten children. So it comes as quite a shock to find that not only have we not progressed in terms of providing programs for preschool students; we've actually regressed.

I'd like to spend a few minutes now talking about what the goals are of early childhood programs, because I think in the political battles that often take place here what we're talking about can often be obscured. In preparation for this Bill to be presented to the House, our education critic asked each of the members to visit their local kindergartens and to observe the kinds of activities that were going on there, and I think for the most part members have complied with that wish. I know that I have had the opportunity in my constituency to recently visit kindergartens, and I compared that experience in Mill Woods with experience I've had in kindergartens in the inner city and also the experience I've had in kindergartens in some of the more affluent areas of the city. For those members who haven't been there, I think it's a visit they should soon make.

The goals of early childhood programs are multiple. Among the most important, of course, is to develop a child's potential language. If you spend some time in a kindergarten, you'll soon and quickly realize what a wide range of differences those young children come to those kindergarten programs with. In inner-city kindergarten some of those children were barely able to say their

own names, and they were in the classroom with youngsters who were fluent, who obviously had a great deal of experience speaking at home and in the community and were quite capable. So there's a huge range of differences in those early childhood classrooms.

This particular kindergarten had youngsters working on family histories. The teacher had taken a Land camera photo of each youngster, and it was the task of each youngster to try to provide some information about his or her own family. Again, you saw this huge, huge difference in their capabilities. It was interesting to watch as that kindergarten teacher and helpers in the classroom encouraged youngsters to talk about themselves, encouraged them to talk about their families, and missed no opportunity to help youngsters express themselves as best they could. So developing a child's potential for language is a paramount concern for early childhood programs.

Another major goal is to develop understanding, and this is across a wide range of areas: understanding of symbols, understanding of how to express oneself, and understanding of some basic science concepts. I was delighted to watch a group of four and five year olds in a kindergarten in the southwest part of the city working with a kit where they had to plan a community. Even those four and five year olds were able to at that level identify some basic community planning, some land use patterns as they objected to their neighbours putting a factory or a store next to their home in the model they were building on the table. It was really quite revealing to see. Even though they didn't have the adult labels, they certainly had the adult concepts that they were working with. So developing understanding is extremely important to early childhood programs.

Reasoning power; increasing youngsters' reasoning power, fostering that reasoning power. Children who are three, four, five years old can be extremely egocentric. Taking turns, learning to think through taking turns, learning the benefits from working co-operatively are a huge part of what they are trying to establish. Again, you watched young children moving from learning centre to learning centre trying to reason how they would spend their time, which activities would be best for them to spend their time on. They also tried to reason out where other children were going to be and why they were spending the time the way they were.

I think particularly when youngsters come from areas of our city that in some ways may be disadvantaged, the goal that programs have in terms of identification is again very important. Young children have to learn who they are, and they have to build a positive self-image. This is done mainly in the home but to a great extent in our early childhood programs. They have to develop a positive self-image. They have to develop the competence to go ahead with tasks, to explore, and to nurture that kind of curiosity that they all bring naturally to those early programs.

Socialization goals of kindergarten I think may seem in the rhetoric to be overemphasized, but if they are, again it's only because they're so important. Those socialization goals are particularly important as they reinforce the values of the home, as they attempt to reinforce the values of our neighbourhood, as young children take on and learn the values of the communities in which they live.

So, Mr. Speaker, the goals, the reasons for having early childhood programs I think have been established, have been shared worldwide, and I think most jurisdictions that can possibly afford such programs move quickly and willingly into them and extend them as far as they possibly can.

4:10

I'd like to conclude with a quote from the survey that was referred to earlier, Mr. Speaker. This particular parent writing about early childhood programs indicated:

Isn't it ironic that the Klein government is cutting kindergarten funding as part of its plan to reduce the deficit - when the big reason cited for deficit-reduction is so as not to saddle our children with an unfair debt load. By depriving our children of an educational experience which is mandated in 9/10 other provinces, our children are still becoming "saddled" - just in a different way.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My comments today may be somewhat brief compared to some of the previous speakers; nonetheless, I'd like to make a few of them that I feel do represent the majority of the constituents that I represent.

Comments that have been made today about ECS in terms of the validity in a general sense for interaction and preparation I think are worthy. I think they're good attributes of a noncompulsory component of our educational funding system. Many of us here in this Assembly never had the opportunity or the option of attending ECS. Many of us I believe probably were subject to a one- or two-day preparation period before we hit the big school, grade 1, on that famous day when mothers cried and dads were glad we were gone.

MR. N. TAYLOR: We could have guessed anyhow. You don't have to tell us.

MR. McFARLAND: For some of us, like the Member for Redwater, dinosaurs were still roaming, but you still had a good educational system, grades 1 to 12, I'm quite sure, because I believe you became an engineer, and you did it without ECS.

As a father of four I attended ECS with our children as a volunteer dad whenever I could. I tried to work it into a busy schedule, a schedule that many parents who are constituents make up today, where both mom and dad have to work. I sometimes have to wonder if perhaps ECS has become a convenience mechanism in substitute for a day care centre. We don't have day care in the smaller rural populations. I don't want that to be taken as a put-down on ECS, but it has definitely been a successful means of taking care of children when both parents had to work in order to sustain their small business or their farm.

MS LEIBOVICI: Kindergarten doesn't run along work hours. Haven't you figured that out yet?

MR. McFARLAND: ECS is not compulsory and it is not mandatory, and I'm not convinced that making it mandatory guarantees any improved outcomes. Community ECS programs would be replaced under this Bill by the rigid policies and guidelines of school boards because the school boards would now administer the ECS programs. I think this year's budget, showing an increase in program hours of 20 percent . . .

MS LEIBOVICI: Whoopee. Make sure Saturday's speech is to all your constituents.

MR. McFARLAND: . . . has demonstrated to Albertans that we have listened to their concerns. I also believe that a five-day . . .

MS LEIBOVICI: Especially families of children under the age of five.

MR. McFARLAND: Would you like to stand up and talk?

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: As the Assembly knows, I have a problem hearing. Unfortunately, I am hearing two people speak at the same time, and I can't determine who it is that has the floor. One is a voice that comes from the region of Edmonton-Meadowlark, and the other one comes from the region of Little Bow. Could we please take our turns right now? It is Little Bow's turn, and yours will come.

Debate Continued

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that a five-day program from January to June accompanied by an increase of 42 percent in ECS funding this year will accomplish the very same thing as a 400-hour program did in the past.

West Yellowhead claims that we're cutting funding for this form of education at the knees, and he also makes an accusation that government at the same time reduces funding to what I term questionable works of art. Well, I don't see the relation for this very reason: when the provincial government began to fund ECS in 1973, it did so because they felt there may have been a need for ECS. That was some 25 years ago, Mr. Speaker.

Now at the same time, a couple of the members opposite have made numerous comments that without ECS our children will become prostitutes, gun-toting people who tend to break the law. But may I ask you a question, Mr. Speaker? If this were the case, if in fact without ECS children were subject to jail, became prostitutes, became anything but law-abiding citizens, then why has this not improved with ECS funding over the past 25 years? I don't follow the logic of West Yellowhead.

Edmonton-Centre talked about national shame, about representing the majority of Albertans. Well, I would like to put a point of view across from meetings that I've had with supporters of the public school system, of ECS. I guess the question that I asked those people at the forum was this, Mr. Speaker. Yes, if I'm here at a meeting tonight of ECS supporters and, yes, if I am to represent you, indeed I'll go back and speak for 400 hours of education. But if I call a public meeting with ECS supporters at the same time and in the same community that I was in and have a fair representation of all people from all walks of life show up at the public meeting, I can guarantee that over 60 percent of the people in that area would not have kids in ECS, nor would they have children in the school system, yet they continue to pay education taxes. Now, I'm in a bit of a quandary. I'm supposed to represent the majority of my constituents . . .

MR. HENRY: Why don't you read your poll?

MR. McFARLAND: The fact is, Edmonton-Centre, that the majority of citizens in Little-Bow do not have children in ECS. So I pose the question: who should I represent? Those who say we should put our priority on the educational system with the existing school system and programs? Or should we put it on the minority of the children, who have accessibility at 240 hours with an increased funding level of 42 percent who do not even have at this point in time a mandatory program?

I respect that Calgary-Bow as a past educator and West Yellowhead as a past educator have differing points of view, and

I think that maybe typifies this whole argument where there is no consensus on whether or not ECS should or should not be a mandatory part of the educational system. The Minister of Education is a past educator, one of the previous speakers is a past educator, and they have differing opinions. I believe in my own mind that when I listen to the arguments, I have to realize that the jury is still out and that anything but a strong majority opinion has been presented on the attributes of a compulsory ECS program.

Maybe the best thing I can do, Mr. Speaker, is resort to a lady that I respected very much who taught grade 1 for 21 years in one of the small communities from our area. She wasn't the type of teacher who people assume you might be after 21 years of teaching. She was dynamic, she was dedicated, and she loved kids. She maintained until the day she passed away that she had never had one child that she couldn't bring up to the very same level with or without ECS by the middle of October. Now, this was a lady who had graduated from the old normal school, who went back years later to upgrade herself at the University of Calgary, and who dedicated 21 years of her life to teaching grade 1 kids from every walk of life, from the rich and the poor, from various religious backgrounds, and in a community that had both public and private schools available. She maintained – and I have to respect her opinion – that there wasn't a child that she couldn't bring up to the same level by mid-October with or without ECS.

Mr. Speaker, that sums up the comments that I have to make. I happily accept the Member for Edmonton-Centre's challenge to stand up and represent the views of the majority of my constituents. I am, and I will not support Bill 202.

4:20

MR. DICKSON: Before the debate commenced, I had some notion of what I wanted to say, but I found the speakers we've heard in the last hour so provocative that I think I'll throw away the notes and come at it from a different tack altogether.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Those notes are so boring.

MR. DICKSON: Notes are indeed boring, Madam Minister.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most fascinating kinds of dichotomies I can imagine is this. We have a government and a Provincial Treasurer that have come forward and talked boldly about this province providing leadership not only nationally but internationally. We hear talk about bold new horizons. We hear talk about how we're going to do things in terms of bringing in those kind of high-skill, high-paid jobs that all Albertans want to see. We hear the rhetoric. We hear the Premier talk about it. We hear the minister without portfolio responsible for economic development talk about it. That's one face of government, but this schizophrenic government also presents a very different face, and we've heard it this afternoon. We've heard people reaching back to talk about their own experience in terms of whether they had kindergarten and whether they had known somebody who had not been to kindergarten but had still turned out to achieve in some sense and have a job and be a prominent citizen.

I've sat and I've listened, and I'm having a great deal of difficulty reconciling these two faces of government: a government that wants to boldly go and take the children of this province into an era of prosperity and a bright and a promising future, and a government that nickels-and-dimes, a government that says – and I'm embarrassed to report this, Mr. Speaker – that the evidence isn't conclusive, the evidence isn't overwhelming, there's some disagreement between some of the experts in terms

of whether 400 hours will do it, whether 225 hours will do it, whether it's 600 hours.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, what we know and we know without any uncertainty whatsoever is that the future of this province is in education. The future of this province is making sure that every five-year-old child in this province, whether in the Little Bow constituency or in downtown Calgary, is going to get the best education we can provide. This isn't about trying to squeeze hours and splitting hours and talking about maybe getting by with less, that maybe the studies aren't conclusive that 400 hours is the magic threshold or the key point. What every member in this Assembly knows, what I'd submit every expert educator knows is that investment in education and investment in children is an investment in our economic future.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk about two schools. I wanted to talk about two very different schools, because the schizophrenic performance of the government opposite puts me in mind of doing things in that kind of a dual sense. The one school I want to talk about is W.O. Mitchell school, which is located in the Silver Springs community in northwest Calgary, a community where the parents are what we'd probably describe as middle income. The other school I want to talk about is Connaught community school, a block from my constituency office.

There are 24 first languages spoken in the school in Connaught plus English. They have a turnover in that school of something in the order of 60 percent in the course of a year. It's typically a question of parents that can't stay in apartments, that end up getting evicted from apartments, picking up children, moving on to someplace else to live. In the W.O. Mitchell elementary school, which is where the Member for Calgary-Bow had taught more recently before becoming elected, what we found was that we had more parents signing up and wanting to get involved on the parent advisory council, on school tours than virtually could be accommodated in the program. There was a waiting list. It may well be that in a school there you could find that some of those children would have found the stimulation, the support through their families, through their parents. They might not have required early childhood services.

But I look at Connaught community school and I see there that those children have an absolute need for the earliest start we can give them. If they don't have the opportunity to start school when they're five, if we don't have that opportunity to identify learning problems, if we don't have that opportunity to start trying to give those children the kind of equal opportunity that it's the responsibility of government to provide them, then we're not doing our job as legislators and this government isn't doing the job that the taxpayers and the constituents expect.

Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely concerned. There are two myths that I hear propagated by the members opposite. Certainly the Member for Pincher Creek-MacLeod, the Member for Calgary-Egmont, and, I regret to say, the Member for Calgary-Bow talk about this notion of parents taking more responsibility. The reality is that in a whole lot of schools it is simply preposterous to say that parents should take more responsibility.

In Connaught community school, in Victoria community school, in St. Monica elementary/junior high school, all schools in downtown Calgary, you can't get parents involved. It takes enormous effort to get parents involved. Many of the parents are new Canadians. There are language difficulties. There are cultural difficulties. Often these parents, both father and mother, are working at jobs, evening jobs, simply trying to be able to pay the rent. You don't get the same kind of parent participation.

So those parents maybe help as best they can, but the reality is that their children are missing out on that opportunity of an early childhood service. I think what's important, Mr. Speaker, is to remind all members – and this ties in with the second myth. The second myth we've heard is that there's ample provision for children from low-income families. Well, I mentioned those three schools in my constituency, and the reality is that there is not enough funding to be able to provide the programs those children require.

Mr. Speaker, what we find is that in the city of Calgary, because of the funding cutbacks, no school district can designate more than 10 percent of their schools as high-needs schools qualifying for additional funding. It's not a question of what the need is; the fact is that you can only have 10 percent of the schools in the Calgary public system qualify for the additional high-needs funding. Well, the result is that there are schools that require it and simply aren't getting it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just sum up by saying that it's absolutely preposterous that these legislators and this Assembly are quibbling over hours and how few hours we can get away with. The point is that we had 400 hours before. The point is that there is a consensus that the 400 hours is helpful, and I think all members would be anxious that we take full advantage of that. I think we have to do better for the children of this province. I think this is an opportunity to do that, and this is an opportunity to start the kind of economic performance we need in this province.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in speaking in opposition to Bill 202, I would like to start out by making four of what I think are the essential points in terms of the program being proposed by the government.

First of all, one of the things that has been lacking in our approach to the preparation of students for grade 1 is that we have not had a definitive program statement which outlines the initial learnings that students should have access to upon preparation for and nearing the time of entering into grade 1. I recently announced and provided a program statement which provides for the first time in this province a clear outline in fairly specific terms of the initial learnings and the expectations that the system will meet in preparing students for grade 1. So that is a first, Mr. Speaker. It has not been there before. The socialization goals or the child development goals that have been related to the overall statement on ECS have been there for a long time, but they have not been focused and are subject to a great deal of interpretation and a great deal of variation in their application across the province.

4:30

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, that program statement is related to an allotment of time in which those objectives can be delivered, and that is 240 hours, or one-quarter time. Those two things form a package. I think everybody in the Assembly would agree that a very important objective of any preschool program is the preparation for grade 1. There might be a wide range of other things that some people would like to sweep into the ambit of early childhood services, but certainly they should agree upon that, I would think.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, another part of our funding announcement is that for the first time in the province, to my knowledge, it is clear that all students across this province have access should their parents or guardians choose to access it. They have access to a basic early childhood services program of 240 hours supporting those essential learnings that I mentioned earlier. They have

access to a 240-hour program without tuition fees – without tuition fees – and that has not been the case before. There's been a great variation in hours. There's been a great variation in charges all across this province, be it school board or community operated.

The fourth very important feature of our announcement, Mr. Speaker, is that, yes, there is also the flexibility for a school board to add hours, to add features to the program as they judge advisable. That can be done by allocating money from other funding sources, from other parts of the block provided, or through charging instruction fees or tuition fees, or – and this is also a possibility – going the plebiscite route come the fall of 1995. So that flexibility, which is a proposal in many of the petitions and many of the meetings that have been related to ECS, is also being dealt with here.

Fifthly, Mr. Speaker, and very, very important is that we have never questioned the need to provide special funding, prior to entry into school, to children who have special needs. I would remind the members of the Assembly that we have maintained such funding as the program unit grants and the funding for the mild and moderately handicapped at a much earlier age than five years of age, as it was before.

There's been a great deal of talk this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, about the socioeconomically disadvantaged in the younger years of our population. We introduced last year, I'd just like to remind the Assembly, a new grant program called PEP, which provides to schools across the province who meet certain socio-economic criteria funding for projects to help in dealing with those circumstances. While last year those grants were limited to Edmonton and Calgary, this year those are extended to other centres who have schools in this particular category.

So, Mr. Speaker, to me there are five very, very important features. In some cases they are features which have not been there before in terms of providing an overall network of support and programming for children before their entry into school. It's focused. It deals with identified objectives and outcomes. It is something that we will be able to, yes, evaluate and look at in performance terms in the future, and we'd certainly want to do so. We would not deny that needing to be done at all.

Mr. Speaker, I want, of course, to stay within the time limits, but I would like to therefore make two or three additional remarks. I won't go all through the various arguments that have been made from across the way of varying quality, but I would just like to mention two or three things.

First of all, there's been reference to research, Mr. Speaker. There is a great deal of writing, a great deal of material on this particular topic. In terms of what is the best length of time for an early childhood services program, or that type of program, it is very inconclusive, very inconclusive. The 400 hours that we have had reference to this afternoon has been related to on an historic basis. It was a period of time or an allotment of time that was picked back in the history of the province, but the problem, of course, is that there was not a program that was definitive related to it. The objectives, the scope of things that you could do in an ECS program were very, very broad and wide ranging and not focused.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there's been reference to our place globally in terms of global competition. Well, there are a number of research studies and learned articles, certainly in the learned article category, which suggest that any differential in school achievement with respect to having none or a lot of kindergarten disappears at about the grade 3 level. Now, that is certainly, I

think, an important thing to consider. Perhaps in the future we will have more definitive and better research on that particular question. But I think when we're talking about global competition, this is something of a smoke screen, to get into that particular topic. When it comes to global competition, in the information, the work that is being done currently when we are making comparisons with other countries, particularly those that are deemed to be very successful economically in the world, the essential elements that are noted where North American education is deficient is that, first of all, we do not have close working relationships between business and industry and the education system so there is a close meshing of objectives and efforts and the allocation of funds there.

There are a number of other items in that category, Mr. Speaker, which do not relate to the topic under discussion this afternoon but are items that we are addressing in our overall Education business plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Education, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public Bill to close debate, all questions must be put to conclude debate on the motion for second reading. I would invite, then, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to close debate on Bill 202.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I had this feeling that I would be disappointed by the time that one hour and 55 minutes had passed and half of that time had been spent by the Conservatives' participation in this debate. I am disappointed in the extreme, because I detect arising out of the arguments made by this government, by its members, by its Minister of Education that in fact there is a resistance to kindergarten funding, not based upon any kind of appreciation of what children need or what contribution kindergarten makes to children's education and to the quality of the potential for their future, but instead it is strictly bottom-line related.

What is particularly difficult to understand is how when assessing a \$25 million cut to kindergarten, they become obsessively bottom-line related, but when assessing a \$21 million increase to paving roads, they can't quite make the comparison. They can't understand that there are priorities, that responsible government has to set priorities that are consistent with the values of people in our society, and that responsible government has to make choices based on those priorities. When you choose \$21 million worth of extra paving over \$25 million worth of kindergarten education, I submit, Mr. Speaker, that you have a government that is undertaking a course of action which is offensive to us and offensive to many, many Albertans.

4:40

You know, so much is becoming obvious about how this government always finds somebody to blame for each and every facet of its unbalanced budgets. If it isn't a student who's taking an extra year of high school to try and upgrade to get into increasingly fewer positions in postsecondary education, it's always somebody else in this society. The flip side of that is that strong government, excellent government finds a way to break down the barriers in society, to break down the divisions, the differences, and the distinctions in society by pursuing equality of opportunity. What we find in this government's position is a complete lack of understanding of how kindergarten can play a role in breaking down the divisions between those children who are less advantaged and those children who are more advantaged

in our society. Mr. Speaker, there are at least 100,000 children living below the poverty line in this province. It has gone up four times over the last 10 years of this Conservative regime. Kindergarten, if ever it has an impact on children's lives – and it certainly does – has an impact profound on the lives of children who are less advantaged, who are disadvantaged.

You know, I've often said that many Conservatives simply lack an imagination. They cannot imagine what it is like to be somebody else, and I was reminded of that when I heard these arguments by the government talking about how parents aren't taking sufficient responsibility. The parents I know take an awful lot of responsibility for their children. Again, here's the government saying it's the parents' fault; let's put down the parents. We could argue that maybe parents should take responsibility for the education of their children in grade 1 or grade 5 or grade 6. You know, the last time I checked, Mr. Speaker, parents do take responsibility, because they pay taxes, they hire people to teach their children, they work nights and they work afternoons, and they volunteer throughout the days to make their children's education better. It is very dismissive and very, very unacceptable for these members to stand with that arrogance and say that somehow parents aren't taking responsibility for their children in this province and in this society. It is more division and it's more putting people down, and we're getting sick and tired of it.

The fact of the matter is, though, that this government should imagine what it's like to be a single parent living on social assistance with one of the 100,000 children who are living below the poverty line and ask themselves how is it that that mother, because it almost always is, finds the energy, at the end of a day of one job or two jobs at minimum wage, to supplement and support her children in the school system like we can, like people who live like us can support and supplement the efforts of our children in the school system.

Kindergarten is an extremely important initiative that leads to the equalization of opportunity for children across this province, and it is being lost because of this particular government's studies. The Minister of Education stands up and talks about studies. He mentions these amorphous studies that will defend his position, which we absolutely never see. The flip side of the argument is that there are no studies to support the effect of kindergarten.

Mr. Speaker, it is time that they realize they are wrong and they vote for this Bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time has come to vote on this issue. All those in favour of second reading of Bill 202, School (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Act, 1995, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Defeated. Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abdurahman	Henry	Sekulic
Bracko	Hewes	Soetaert

Bruseker	Kirkland	Taylor, N.
Chadi	Leibovici	Van Binsbergen
Collingwood	Massey	White
Dickson	Mitchell	Zariwny
Germain	Nicol	Zwozdesky
Hanson		
Against the motion:		
Ady	Haley	McFarland
Black	Havelock	Mirosh
Brassard	Herard	Oberg
Calahasen	Hierath	Paszkowski
Clegg	Jacques	Pham
Coutts	Jonson	Renner
Day	Kowalski	Severtson
Dinning	Laing	Stelmach
Fischer	Lund	Taylor, L.
Forsyth	Magnus	Thurber
Friedel	Mar	West
Gordon	McClellan	Yankowsky
Totals:	For - 22	Against - 36

[Motion lost]

Bill 203 Family Day Amendment Act, 1995

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to keep my comments as brief as possible because I know . . . [some applause] Now I'm going to keep them long. I know there are a number of members who would appreciate the opportunity to speak to this Bill.

Bill 203, the Family Day Amendment Act, will allow Albertans to continue to reflect on the importance of the family while putting it in line with other family celebrations such as Mother's Day and Father's Day. This Bill will allow us to still concentrate on the importance of the family. Albertans need a day to reflect upon the importance of the family, and they should be encouraged to take advantage of that opportunity. However, Albertans don't need another statutory holiday in order to do this.

I'd like to begin by providing some background on Family Day. Family Day was established on August 18, 1989, when the Family Day Act received Royal Assent. The Act established the third Monday in February each year as a public holiday in Alberta, and it has been celebrated annually since then. Ever since its establishment, the continuation of Family Day as a statutory holiday has been questioned by a number of individuals, groups, and organizations who are not convinced of the value of designating a weekday, rather than a Sunday, as Family Day.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

To begin the debate, I would like to make it very clear that Bill 203 does not advocate the abolishment of Family Day. Rather, I am suggesting that we continue to celebrate the family every day and have one special day once a year.

5:00

Family Day will still reinforce the importance of spending time with family, and communities can still focus on family-oriented activities and celebrations. Currently many businesses, associations, media, and municipalities are initiating or sponsoring special activities for the family. I think that it is truly beneficial

to recognize the important role families play, but at the same time these celebrations can still be carried out on a Sunday.

I am a mother of two, and I know the importance of making every day possible a family day. In my family we have traditionally made Sunday our family day. We spend the day together, and it helps us to strengthen and nurture our family. Each one of us as parents or family members needs to make it our own responsibility to make time to share with our family, to take advantage of our holidays and our home time in order to concentrate on what is really important.

Take a moment to consider Mother's Day and Father's Day. I'm pretty sure that most of us in this Assembly recognize these days as important and celebrate them in one way or another. Whether it be getting together for a family supper, mailing a card, or making a phone call, most of us take the time to really think about the importance of our parents, our families, or other special people in our lives. We do that without a statutory holiday, and I propose that we do the same for Family Day.

I have received feedback from constituents and concerned citizens. The vast majority of individuals have been very supportive of Bill 203, although admittedly I have heard from some people who do not want to lose this statutory holiday. But of these people opposed to losing the statutory holiday, only a few were concerned about the time that would be lost to spend with family. Not one other individual mentioned lost family time at all. They were, however, reluctant to give up an additional statutory holiday. This tells me that the reason behind the development of Family Day is being overlooked by Albertans. Mr. Speaker, Family Day was not intended to become just another long weekend. It was proposed to encourage individuals to reflect on the importance of families, to celebrate the strengths, vitality, and meaning of families, and to rededicate ourselves to our foundation and our family. The importance of these things has not changed.

I am well aware, as is the Klein government, of the importance of strong and healthy families, but at the same time that we are recognizing the importance of the family, we also must keep in mind the necessities of fiscal responsibility. I strongly feel that the importance of a family can just as well be easily reinforced on a Sunday as it is on a Monday. I don't believe that this province can continue to reduce spending in other areas and maintain such a costly day as Family Day. Not only do employers have to pay their employees for services they are not providing, but in cases where the employee is obliged to work the holiday, he or she receives the regular day plus time and a half. In fact, the MUSH group - municipalities, universities, schools, and hospitals - pays almost \$36 million in payroll on an average day in February, and the industrial aggregate pays out approximately \$105 million. These figures do not even reflect the total payroll costs that could be saved by eliminating the statutory holiday, because some employees would continue to work on that day and need to be compensated accordingly. These figures also do not take into account the lost day of productivity.

It is sometimes argued that despite the obvious payroll costs, Family Day does generate revenue. This argument, however, does not consider the entire picture. Economic gains are for the most part only realized by retail, tourism, and hospitality industries. The gains are limited and do not compensate for the losses in other areas. Furthermore, despite the economic benefits which a limited number of sectors do enjoy, a recent survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business tells us that the membership voted very strongly in favour of eliminating Alberta Family Day as a statutory holiday. Seventy-two percent

of the respondents wanted to eliminate the stat holiday, compared to 24 percent who felt the holiday should be retained. The Alberta Chamber of Commerce is also in favour of celebrating Family Day on a Sunday.

The unnecessary cost of Family Day is even greater when you consider the fact that seven out of the nine other provinces recognize fewer holidays than Alberta. British Columbia and Saskatchewan are the only other two provinces with nine general holidays. That means that seven other provinces are not having to overcome the same obstacles as businesses and industries in Alberta. In addition, businesses which do a certain amount of business with other jurisdictions often must remain open on Family Day to be accessible to other jurisdictions or risk losing business. I strongly believe that moving Family Day to a Sunday is consistent with the government's desire to enhance Alberta's competitive edge.

Again, I'd like to make it clear that Bill 203 does not revoke Family Day; it simply moves the celebration to a Sunday. It does absolutely nothing to jeopardize Alberta families. Even the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families has stated that they have no opposition to making Family Day a designated holiday rather than a statutory holiday.

I am aware that with today's changing family culture, it is increasingly important to recognize the integral roles and responsibilities of Alberta families. I therefore entirely support the continuation of a Family Day celebration. At the same time, however, we must also ensure that Albertans are unfettered in their pursuit to compete nationally and internationally. By concentrating on the needs of the family as well as on the needs of businesses throughout this province, we are ensuring a bright and secure future for Alberta. I am committed to Alberta families, and I am committed to seeing this province reduce spending and increase fiscal responsibility. For these reasons I urge the members of the Assembly to support Bill 203.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start my comments by warning Albertans to beware of Conservative politicians bearing gifts, because they giveth and then they taketh away. What I'd like to do is just refresh those members who were here on June 19, 1989, with what the then Premier of the province, a Conservative Premier, said about Bill 1, Family Day Act. It's

an opportunity for all hon. members to see the family play a bigger and bigger part in the future of Alberta. I know that the values that our pioneers built this province on were the values of home and family, and as we get into the speed of modern society, I think sometimes we forget about those foundations that helped us to build such a magnificent province. I'm looking forward to seeing communities all across Alberta make Family Day an important part of the tradition in the future.

The Associate Minister of Family and Social Services at the time said that this

Bill has made people more aware, involved, and caring. And this government does care.

That was the government at that time, and that of course was then, and this is now.

And that's the purpose of the Bill . . . We're talking about the importance to the family and getting back to the meaning and the caring and the responsibilities that we all know and share.

Other comments were made by the Premier about the opposition at the time, who said: well, if you really cared about families, what you would do would be to ensure that retail operations stay

closed on Family Day; you would ensure it was indeed a day off for everyone. The Premier at the time said that the opposition was

just unable to accept something new, something exciting, something building, something that is going to be strengthening Alberta . . . We want to support families in all their diverse forms. We want to rededicate our thinking to the family . . . So what we have done is capture the importance of the family. We have stressed it.

MR. N. TAYLOR: May the saints preserve Mr. Getty.

MS LEIBOVICI: Yes, indeed.

Then in his closing comments he said that this Bill – this was on August 15, 1989, not even five and a half years ago – was going to recreate

something that is going to go on in time in the future in Alberta and is going to play a greater and greater role in focusing on one of the traditions, one of the foundations upon which this province is built and why it is such a great province and why we must come back to those traditions and the foundation.

Mr. Getty, the Premier, said:

Tell the members to have some faith in the people, realize that we're breaking new ground here, that this family day will be an important part of the future focus on an important tradition and an important foundation of our province.

But I guess that was then and this is now. The only thing that this government cares about is finances. The only thing that to this government makes this world go round is the dollar and the bottom line.

When I look at Building a Strong Foundation, the government's document, does it say anything in here about people, about communities, about family? What it says on page 8, Principles for Change, – you might want to read it, hon. Treasurer – is, "As we build a strong financial foundation." I don't see anything about foundation with community or family in there. It's, "As we build a strong financial foundation, the government will continue to be guided by the basic principles." One of the things that it says, interestingly enough, is:

The government will communicate regularly with Albertans and consult with them to ensure that their priorities continue to be the government's priorities.

Well, within the opening statements from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek I didn't hear anything about people being mentioned. I heard about the Manufacturers' Association, the federation for business, but I heard nothing about people being consulted, absolutely nothing. But, of course, that was then and this is now. Compassion and caring are gone with this government. All that this government thinks of is creating an environment for business, not for families or the communities.

5:10

Of course, as I'm hearing from the chorus on the other side, the members will say that that's not true, that I've misread what this government is all about, that the two are not mutually exclusive. Then I look at: well, if it's not just money that makes the world go round and if compassion and caring are really parts of this government and if strengthening the family and community is an integral part of this government, then what have we seen in the last two years? We've seen downloading onto municipalities. We've seen downloading onto charities. We've seen downloading onto volunteers and families. We've seen the unpaid volunteer sector, mostly women, doing work that was formerly paid for. But that was of course then, and this is now. The world has changed in the last five years.

The government says that they do care and that they listen and that they're supporting families and communities. Again I need

to sit back and say: okay; let's see how they're doing that. From the literature that I've seen, the most precious resource that anyone needs these days is time, and by taking away Family Day and putting it on a Sunday, you've taken away time, the most precious resource that working people have today.

What we've also seen is that this government refuses to discuss issues, refuses to look at things that can potentially improve family and community, refuses to look at things like benefits for part-time workers, reviewing the annual minimum wage on a yearly basis, refuses to deal with the issue of children and poverty – aren't children part of families; isn't that something that this government should be concentrating on? – refuses to look at the increase in gambling. Sure, it's increased your bottom line, because that's all that you're interested in, but has the increase in VLTs across this province done anything for families and communities? That has looked at redistributing income: that's a statement that I found very interesting by the minister of transportation. I'm still waiting to see what that is, what that means, because my feeling is that redistributing income means downwards, means that redistributing income means going to the lowest possible common denominator, and that's what that means. Has this government done anything for illiteracy?

Now, let's talk about families in this budget. What has this government done for families? The council on families is being abolished. All the work's been done. We don't need it anymore. We'll move the holiday from Monday, from a paid day off to Sunday, and people will be happy. We don't need the council on the family anymore. The work's been done.

What about the Advisory Council on Women's Issues? Women tend to be part of families. Sometimes women's issues aren't coordinated with the needs of family and community, and that also is going to be gone. What about family violence? Two and a half million dollars are taken out of that budget, but this is a government that cares. This is a government that has the deepest concern for families and for community at heart, but it's okay if we just take away Family Day. It's okay if we move it to a Sunday because it didn't serve a purpose anyway. But a purpose to whom? In the opening statements from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek she said that Albertans don't need another statutory holiday. I'd like to know who said that. I'd like to know who of the Albertans across this province said that – who – that were not special interest groups?

If this government was sincerely concerned about families and about being able to ensure that families were to stay together, what about Sunday openings and evening openings? Maybe that's something that should be abolished as well. In 1989 the Premier at that time said: our lives aren't just dollars and cents. Well, in 1995 that situation has changed. But that was then and this is now. I wonder if those members who voted for Bill 1, the Premier's flagship . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon member, I think we have a point of order. Am I right?

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. McFARLAND: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Would the member entertain a question or take a phone number?

MS LEIBOVICI: If you provide the question in writing, I'll answer it.

MR. McFARLAND: No, you ask if I could . . . [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. We've got two . . . [interjections] Order. [interjections] Order. We have a member asking: would you entertain a question? [interjections] Order. Yes or no?

MS LEIBOVICI: If the member wishes to put it in writing, I will answer it. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. It's just been a little noisy here. I didn't get the drift of his phone number because I couldn't hear. Obviously I don't know whether he wants your phone number or whether you want his.

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to provide the member with a phone number. She wanted to know who she could phone, who supported her. I'll provide you with the phone number of somebody that will give you an answer to your question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As an observation, this government likes to use referenda when it suits them. Perhaps they would like to include this question on the referendum process as well, whether people would like to see Family Day moved from a Monday to a Sunday.

Now, as I was saying, the members who were in office in 1989 – and there are some of them that are sitting across the way right now – must feel at times schizophrenic. One day they vote for a Bill. They support it in caucus. They agree that it's so important and needs to be the number one Bill. They agree that families are the foundation of Alberta, and they vote yes. Today we have a Bill in front of us that has moved up, that is now Bill 203, so my guess is that it's supported by caucus, that it is a number one priority of this government, and the reasoning is that we can no longer afford Family Day. That's the bottom line. The bottom line is that it costs – and I have yet to see those figures. It would be wonderful if the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek would provide those figures in terms of what the actual premium is that it costs, not the payroll cost but the premium over and above for government employees to work on Family Day.

What I would also like to see is what the intake is on the other side. If the member is not aware in terms of whether Family Day is a success or not, this last Monday downtown Edmonton had 18,000 people – 18,000 people – out at family activities, and my guess is that those 18,000 people spent dollars and that the businesses that provided the services to those individuals made money. I'd like to see some kind of cost-benefit analysis as to what the real costs are of Family Day.

Now, the other rationale that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek used was that we don't really need it; we don't really need the statutory holiday. Well, then, why can't we say the same for Remembrance Day? We don't really need Remembrance Day. We can all stop at 11 o'clock on the 11th day of the 11th month and remember. But do we have Remembrance Day? Yes. Do we need Thanksgiving Day? We don't need Thanksgiving Day, then, either according to the member's logic. The logic is faulty,

and that is what the problem is: it's the same rationale that can be applied.

So I go back to my initial comments. Beware of Conservative politicians bearing gifts, because they giveth and they taketh.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek didn't inform the Assembly that there are some provinces in this country that only have six statutory holidays. There is one province that doesn't celebrate Remembrance Day or Thanksgiving. So does that mean that we have to go to the lowest common denominator? Perhaps six statutory holidays is enough, because for every statutory holiday, according to the member's figures, that have yet to be substantiated, it's another \$35 million. It's the bottom line that counts to this government, nothing else, absolutely nothing else.

5:20

So right now we're not out of line really with other jurisdictions. Some have nine days, some have eight days, some have six days, and it doesn't make us any more or less competitive. So what is the effect of taking away Family Day? The effect is quite simply that it's another tax on Alberta workers. The member didn't mention that AUPE, the provincial government employees' union, has agreed that at least two former general holidays would not be paid. So this is another day when workers, the workers that the Premier likes to say: oh, we really appreciate your sacrifices, but we're going to give you another kick today, and this kick is going to be Family Day. Tomorrow it'll be another kick; won't it? Every day it's another kick from this government to the working people of Alberta.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. RENNEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order: 23(h), makes allegations against another member. The member just said that the Premier, not the government but the Premier, was going to give another kick to labour, and she's making the allegation that the Premier wishes to kick labour through this Bill. I want to remind the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark that this is a private member's Bill. We have free

votes on private member's Bills. This is not a government Bill. So when she says that the Premier wants this Bill passed so that he can kick labour, she is avowing a false motive to the Premier.

MS LEIBOVICI: On the point of order, what I believe I said was that the Premier says that he values public-sector workers, but what the government does is continually turn around and kick them. That is what I said. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Order. Obviously we have a difference of opinion between members of the House. As Acting Speaker I can't agree with everybody, but I think we have a free, democratic system here, and although we can't agree with each other all the time, I believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark can continue her speech.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In closing I would like to reiterate that this Bill is another attack on Alberta workers, it is an attack on families, and it is an attack on communities. It is a Bill that if passed will prove that the Progressive Conservatives are Regressive Conservatives. It is a Bill that once more will be experimenting on Albertans, that once more will make Albertans guinea pigs: we can give you a holiday and then we can take it away. It is a Bill that negates the success that Family Day has had. When 18,000 people go to downtown Edmonton with their families, it is a success. When the Banff tourist association says that the taking away of Family Day would have a great impact on their economy, it is a success. Family Day has become a success over the years. If I can just remind members of what the hon. Premier, the Conservative Premier, of this province said in closing on his Bill when it was passed, he indicated that it

is going to go on in time in the future . . . and is going to play a greater and greater role in focusing on one of the traditions, one of the foundations upon which this province is built.

Thank you very much.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

