

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 21, 1995**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 95/03/21

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others.

We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

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

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

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee I would like to table the report of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee.

Thank you.

head: Notices of Motions

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I give notice that tomorrow we will move that written questions and motions for returns stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

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

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give oral notice of the following motion:

Be it resolved that the report of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee, appointed by this Assembly on November 9, 1994, be now received and concurred in.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to give notice now that immediately after question period I will seek unanimous consent of the House pursuant to Standing Order 40 for a motion recognizing this day as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

Bill 19 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 1995

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 1995.

There are both major and minor amendments that are required to enable the effective administration of the Act. These amend-

ments will ensure public access to government information while ensuring the protection of Albertans' privacy.

[Leave granted; Bill 19 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to file today with the Assembly four copies of the Alberta Air Strategy Baseline Study. The development of this study was announced by the Premier in Seizing Opportunity: Alberta's New Economic Development Strategy. It was a co-operative effort between the government and the two local airport authorities in consultation with smaller communities in the province of Alberta.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to table three different documents. Firstly, there are two letters dated February 23, 1995, to the Member for Taber-Warner, chairman of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee. The third item is a memorandum from myself dated March 21 highlighting a number of concerns, sir, with respect to the process of that particular search committee.

Thank you.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling four copies each of a letter from Mrs. Vachon of St. Albert, who, like many other seniors, has been seriously affected by the cuts to seniors. The letters are to the Premier and to the Minister of Community Development. Mrs. Vachon challenges the Premier and minister to live on her pension.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today four copies of Ensuring Prosperity: Implementing Sustainable Development, the report of the Future Environmental Directions for Alberta Task Force. This report was released earlier today and is being widely distributed throughout the province of Alberta and to all members of the Assembly.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce a number of members that are here today that sat on the Future Environmental Directions for Alberta Task Force. They are the authors of the report that I just tabled today, and these people have served as volunteers on the task force since September of 1993.

I would ask that they rise as I call their names and remain standing until all have been introduced. First, Bob Elliott, a retired agriculture research scientist and formerly a Member of this Legislative Assembly; Judy Huntley, an environmental researcher from Maycroft; Elmer Kure, a conservationist from Innisfail; Don Laishley of Weldwood of Canada, formerly of

Hinton and now of Vancouver; Werner Messerschmidt, a councillor from the municipal district of Woodlands, from Whitecourt; Clarence Olthuis, a farmer from Neerlandia; Bob Page, dean of the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary; and Millard Wright of Gulf Canada Resources in Calgary. They're accompanied by David Anderson of the Environment Council of Alberta, who is chair of the task force, and a number of members from various departments who are also part of the project. I would ask the other members to also rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 23 students from the Alberta Vocational College located in Edmonton-Centre. They are enrolled in the transitional vocational program. They're accompanied by two of their teachers and two of their interpreters: Mrs. Bev Cooper, Miss Tina Bak, Mrs. Dana Toma, and Mrs. Tami Ilkuf. I understand that they're in the members' gallery. If they could rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce a group of my constituents who are here attending the Association for Community Living conference: Donna and Bryan Dowell and their daughter Debbie, Mrs. Donna Jacobsen, and Ms Judi Samoissette. They're in the public gallery. I wonder if they would rise and receive the warm welcome.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to other Members of the Legislative Assembly 46 bright and eager students from Sweet Grass elementary school, accompanied today by two educators. Those two educators reflect what we see in the schools today, the three Cs: caring, committed, and competent. I would ask Mrs. Pat Smith and Ms Marie Anne McLean to please stand with the students and receive the acknowledgement of this House.

1:40

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce a very special guest who's visiting us from Winnipeg, Mr. Terry Martin. He's a senior official with the Canadian Wheat Board out of Winnipeg who's been traveling western Canada discussing issues relating to the grains business as it pertains to western Canada. Mr. Martin is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask him to rise and meet the usual fine reception and welcome of the House.

MR. LANGEVIN: M. le Président, aujourd'hui il me fait plaisir de vous présenter 38 Francophones, personnes d'âge d'or, des paroisses de St. Thomas, de l'Immaculée Conception, et de St. Joachim. Ils sont venus visiter le Parlement.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present to you, to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly 38 Francophone seniors from Edmonton. They came to visit our Legislature

today. I'd like to mention that in the group there is Mrs. Rollande Lefevbre, who has been a longtime resident of St. Paul. Also, I have met a long-lost cousin, Mrs. Thérèse Brian, and also my wife's uncle and aunt Rene and Louise Amyotte. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like to ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to inform you and through you members of this Assembly and the people in the galleries that today is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The date commemorates the occasion 35 years ago on this date when peaceful demonstrators against apartheid in South Africa were killed and wounded in what has come to be known as the Sharpeville massacre.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was established by the United Nations in 1966 as an opportunity for people around the world to reflect upon the challenges of racism and racial discrimination and the need to meet those challenges effectively. On March 21, 1986, the Prime Minister called on all Canadians to extend their efforts to ensure the rapid eradication of racism and racial discrimination and the realization of mutual understanding, respect, equality, and justice for all Canadians. In September of 1988 ministers attending a federal/provincial/territorial ministerial conference on human rights agreed to commemorate the 21st of March in all Canadian jurisdictions, and I'm pleased to rise in this Assembly today to renew that commitment.

The government of Alberta works to eliminate racial discrimination in many areas including but not limited to the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission and the Alberta Human Rights Commission. The first goal of the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission's current three-year action plan is to eliminate racism and discrimination in Alberta. The commission works with a variety of partners to educate and inform Albertans about the benefits of diversity and to reduce barriers in the private and public sectors. The Alberta Human Rights Commission also works to educate and inform Albertans about their rights and their responsibilities, and it helps protect Albertans who face racial discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, combatting racism is not just the responsibility of government and government agencies. It is the responsibility of all Albertans and all Alberta communities. As children, many will remember the song that goes: let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me. If we want to make the world a better place, the best place to start may be in our own backyards, and that is where a lot of Albertans are starting.

I would like to acknowledge the work of two groups in particular: the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations and the Committee on Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding. The members of these groups have organized education and information activities to commemorate March 21 in the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the minister for getting at least one hour ago a copy of the ministerial statement.

What I want to do, Mr. Speaker, is draw members' attention to the last paragraph of the ministerial statement, which says:

Combating racism is not just the responsibility of government and government agencies. It is the responsibility of all Albertans and all Alberta communities.

Well, I think that tells us hugely what's missing from this government's record in terms of human rights protection. One would have thought that a more powerful direction would have been the comments that came from a former MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, Senator Ron Ghitler, who said:

Human rights legislation, in and of itself, will not eradicate the tragedy of discrimination. It is the role of government to provide the leadership and the means by which Albertans will come to understand the nature and existence of prejudice in our province. It must provide, by way of example, the commitment to reduce its harmful effects.

We can't wait for well-meaning groups like the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations or the Committee on Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding to do that job, Mr. Speaker. One would think that the government would be embarrassed in terms of pushing out its chest and strutting around and talking about its record. The reality is that the most compelling bit of evidence is what has not been done by this government.

Mr. Speaker, we had a report of some 75 recommendations by a human rights review panel created by the government. The people were installed by members of this government, and those recommendations, which were transmitted to the minister in June of 1994, have still not resulted in a specific response by the government to each of those concrete recommendations. So if we were genuine in this Chamber and if this government were genuine about trying to do something to promote tolerance and to end racism and intolerance, what we would do is get, at minimum, a detailed response to each of those specific recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I think that in every community there are elements of intolerance and racism and bigotry. It's the job of government not to give free rein to those kinds of elements, those kinds of characteristics but to do everything it can to provide leadership, and that means talking about education and making an investment in terms of education.

We still have, Mr. Speaker, the report called A Survey of Attitudes Toward Human Rights and Toward Self in Alberta Schools. We found in that survey, done in 1991, that there are elements of intolerance, particularly in certain elements of the province, among certain age groups. The government, it was recommended, should undertake a further survey and action. We hope they will take that action.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

Health Services Restructuring

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, an 11-year-old girl who needs an operation to alleviate her pain and ultimately to save her life has had this operation canceled twice in the last month because this Premier's health care cuts have been done without any consideration for the consequences. To the Premier: when a regional health care authority can't deliver health care to an 11-year-old girl when she needs it, who exactly does he think is responsible?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, that was a question that was asked most inappropriately by the hon. Leader of the Opposition

in the subcommittee of supply last week. At that particular time I said that these decisions are made on the best advice and the best expertise of the medical profession at the time. If there is something that goes awry in the system, there are processes that can be followed to investigate these kinds of things. One, of course, is the Health Facilities Review Committee, and ultimately the minister has the authority to investigate these particular matters. I don't have the details relative to this case, but perhaps the hon. minister can supplement my answer.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I believe that I answered this question perhaps a week ago in the House and explained to the hon. member that there are a number of pediatric intensive care beds that are quite often required for surgery for pediatric patients. In fact, the region has increased that allocation. But I also pointed out that there will be occasions when an unexpected medical situation may arise that puts pressure on those beds, even on the extended number they have. I have to say, as I did then, that I believe the physicians and the clinical staff in our institutions have to make the decisions on the use of those beds. We will always at some point run into a time when we have pressure on the number of beds due to an emergency that is unforeseen. That's exactly what has occurred in this region in the past two weeks. If the hon. member checked that out with the institution, which is really the appropriate place to do that, or with the physician, he would know that.

1:50

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, when an 11-year-old girl whose spine is so bent that she is literally crushing herself has had her operation canceled twice because the hospital can't deliver it, the regional health authority can't deliver it, the minister of health won't deliver it, how does the Premier look at himself in the mirror every morning and deny that it is his responsibility?

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Chair has been fairly lenient in allowing members to ask opinions, and what the hon. member is asking for is clearly an opinion. That's not the purpose of question period, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Health Services Restructuring (continued)

MR. MITCHELL: When the health care system, Mr. Speaker, is in such chaos that the only way an 11-year-old girl seems to even have a chance to get her operation is to have that case raised in the Legislature, what kind of coward is the Premier . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. That's completely out of order.

Second main question, hon. Leader of the Opposition. Try to do better.

MR. MITCHELL: It's not out of order for that 11-year-old girl, Mr. Speaker.

Health Care Layoffs

MR. MITCHELL: It's simply not fair that the highly paid president of the University of Alberta hospital will receive a huge severance package when the actual caregivers won't. The minister's excuse, Mr. Speaker, is that severance isn't in the

health care workers' contracts. To the Premier: how can it be that the Premier broke the contract in order to demand a 5 percent pay cut from health care workers last year but now hides behind the contract when it comes to making severance payments?

MR. KLEIN: It's quite simple, Mr. Speaker. The 5 percent wage rollback was negotiated. In other words, if there is to be an adjustment to any contract, it takes agreement. In answer to the question, any contract can be adjusted if there is a willingness on the part of the two parties to the contract, and in the case of the 5 percent reduction, there was.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, we know that there's a willingness on the part of nurses and health care workers to negotiate severance. Are the Premier and the Minister of Health saying that they don't have the willingness, that they don't have the political will to negotiate severance with these people?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, we aren't saying that at all.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, how much of the \$40 million in transitional funds given to regional health care authorities is going to be used for huge severance payouts to highly paid hospital administrators while health care professionals, the frontline workers, aren't going to get any severance pay at all?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health supplement. I think that she provided an answer to this question yesterday, but in case the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition didn't hear or preferred not to listen, I'll have her provide the answer again.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I did clarify that there was a \$40 million, onetime payment made to the regional health authorities in this province. There was \$16 million allowed for the Capital regional health authority, \$16 million for the Calgary regional health authority, \$1 million for the Alberta Provincial Mental Health Board, \$1 million for the Alberta Cancer Board, and the balance of the \$40 million was allocated around the regions. When we provided that to the health authorities, we told them that we were responding to requests that we had had from them for assistance in transition. They felt that they could meet their goals of restructuring the system, but because of the time that it was taking to move the process along, they could use some additional help. I simply told them to use those funds prudently, that they were not easy to come by, and that they could use them for any reason they saw necessary and fit in their region.

Regional Health Authorities

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, budget-driven health care in this province has reached a new low. Regional health authorities have been driven to the lowest cost provision of service regardless of the standard of care provided. Value is a combination of both quality and price. To the Minister of Health: when the Calgary health authority contracted out 1,600 cases of cataract surgery, why weren't hospital standards for anesthesia demanded, or was cost the only criterion?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the question should be directed at the regional health authority.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: They're not accountable.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I would say, Mr. Speaker, that they are accountable, and the accountability is certainly much higher than it is in the members opposite in gathering their facts. I would like to see evidence that the Calgary regional health authority in some way contracted a service that was not within clinical standards, and I would want to see that produced.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Maybe we'll get a supplemental answer.

What will the Minister of Health do when, for example, her lowest cost physiotherapy clinics underestimate demand, run out of money, and refuse to offer service?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, very poor research. If the member is referring to the community rehabilitation program that's going to be implemented in this province on July 1, there is a very good plan for implementation of that service. There will be an assessment service with that, and we will ensure that high needs are met no matter how many treatments they need. Previous to that program going into effect, we have a cap on that service, and that cap will be removed. It doesn't just include physical therapy; it includes audiology, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and other services that might be needed. If the hon. member would really make himself familiar with some of these programs, he would see the benefit to the consumers of these programs, that we are talking about quality, that we are talking about meeting needs, and that we're not simply talking about dollars, which seems to be where he's hung up.

MR. SAPERS: Given that last answer, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Health either now correct herself or confirm that there is absolutely no cap on community-based physiotherapy services, no financial cap whatsoever, after July 1? That's what she just said.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I certainly will clarify it for the hon. member because he obviously has not looked at the program, doesn't know it, or I wouldn't have to explain to him. There is no cap for individuals or services provided. There is an amount of dollars that have been provided in that program, and they will be allocated among the regions. If an individual needs service under that program – multidisciplinary, single disciplinary – they will receive the amount of service they need to meet their needs without any cap on that service.

2:00

Surface Rights

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the Minister of Environmental Protection and has to do with grazing leases. Information from constituents tells me that Crown land is being leased to individuals for the grass or hay value on that land. Yet on some of that land, leaseholders are apparently reaping substantial benefits into their own pockets because of side deals with oil companies on surface rights. Mr. Minister, would you tell this Assembly whether that is true?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, this is a fairly complicated process, so it'll take a few moments to outline it. When an oil and gas company wants to drill on Crown land, they apply and buy a mineral surface lease. They usually get access to the well site through a licence of occupation. Now, there's a set fee for that

right, and whether it's land that's under disposition or land that is not under disposition, the fee to the government is the same. Under the Surface Rights Act the lessee has the right to negotiate with the oil and gas company for compensation relating to inconvenience, damage, and those sorts of things. So this money that the hon. member is referring to is money that has been freely negotiated between the oil and gas company and the leaseholder.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Minister, does that surface lease revenue not belong to the province?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my first answer, it doesn't matter whether the land is under disposition or not. The Crown receives a set amount of money. That is set out in a schedule, and it varies depending on the type of land and the location. The other deal that he's referring to is the one that is negotiated between the oil company and the leaseholder.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Minister, what are you prepared to do to address this problem?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a great concern to the public, and to that end I know that the Minister of Energy and the minister of agriculture are contemplating a committee to look at the whole issue. Perhaps the minister of agriculture would be anxious to supplement my answer.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue between two parties. It's an issue that's been successfully negotiated in the past. As a matter of fact, 99 percent of all these contracts that come together are negotiated. It seems to me that when two parties can sit down and negotiate a fair reconciliation, that is the best way of doing it. If we want to develop a totalitarian state, if that's what it is we want to develop, then we can impose, then we can dictate. On the other hand, it seems to me that the democratic process is working and working well.

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

Social Policy

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only positive thing coming out of the Premier's offensive luncheon remarks yesterday is that he confirmed once and for all his government's social policy: if you fall on hard times and are down on your luck, never fear; the Premier is here. He's prepared to bounce you right out of your house and right out of your province. The true meaning of resiliency is that the elite and the powerful get all the advantages while the poor and the vulnerable can just leave. My questions are to the Premier. Mr. Premier, will you now, following your little command performance in which you amused so few, apologize to all those Alberta families and their children who you managed to insult in such a tasteless and vulgar manner?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that very vile and vicious preamble and the ridiculous question does not deserve the dignity of an answer.

MS HANSON: Mr. Premier, how can you have such callous disregard for the families and children made economic victims in large part . . .

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

THE SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. Hon. member, please take your seat. I don't know what's wrong with the lead questions in today's question period, but they have not been prepared in the proper form for asking in this Assembly. The purpose of question period is to obtain factual information from the administration, the Executive Council of this Assembly, not for opinions, not for comments on things that have happened but for factual information on the administration of the government in our province. If the hon. member has a question in that area, the hon. member may ask it.

Social Policy (continued)

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, can you tell us exactly how many social assistance clients you spoke to personally that made the unbelievable statement that all they wanted to do was languish on welfare? You said that yesterday.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, I've spoken to many people who were on welfare and, because of the policies of this government, are no longer on welfare. They're now taking job experience programs. They're upgrading their skills. They're being retrained in jobs, and they're now productive members of society. Indeed, I've had numerous phone calls in my office and at home from people who have said: thank you, Mr. Klein; because of the policies of your government, you have given me the encouragement to do something for myself. That is exactly what I said. What I did say was that those in this province who say that it is my God-given right to live off the system, and no, I won't take advantage – there have been quite a few, as a matter of fact, who have obviously said that, because they are no longer in this province. They have gone someplace where a generous Liberal government will probably give them everything they ask for.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Crow Benefit

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Ag, Food and Rural Development. Many questions and concerns are still coming forward from our constituents about the federal government's recent changes to the Western Grain Transportation Act. Many of my constituents continually ask why we're being discriminated against in the payout by Ottawa in comparison to other agricultural sectors throughout Canada. Would the minister please be specific in indicating to us what actions this government has taken to ensure that Alberta farmers receive fair treatment in the benefits that are paid to them?

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue of great importance, as a matter of fact probably the most important issue the agricultural community will deal with in this century. So I'd ask the indulgence of the House and your

indulgence if I take a little longer to respond, because I'd like to lay out exactly what it is . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order please. The hon. minister can always use other methods to give more lengthy statements. The same rule should apply for question period.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, back a year ago about this time we laid out an eight-point proposal as to the method of how the payment should be paid. It was agreed to by all the farm organizations. It was agreed to by the province of Saskatchewan and most of their farm organizations. As a result of that, we followed up with several press releases to the federal minister requesting that indeed we be heard and that our presentations be reviewed in a positive manner. Following that, we met with the federal minister on two occasions, laid out our proposal in a very firm way. On the night of the budget again I consulted with the federal minister. I asked that we be able to have input because indeed it appeared that it wasn't favourable to Alberta.

Since that time, Mr. Speaker, I have written to the federal minister on three occasions. To date I have not received a response, no response whatsoever. We've been asked to consult. We have laid out our proposals, and we have asked for consideration to be given to what Alberta needs.

2:10

As a follow-up to that, Mr. Speaker, I asked the chairman of the standing policy committee on agriculture and rural development to attend a town hall meeting in Lethbridge because the minister was not able to meet with me to discuss the issue as it pertains to Alberta's needs. The hon. chairman of the standing policy committee asked several questions. Unfortunately, to date those questions have not been answered.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'd hate to be a Saskatchewan federal minister.

What is the proposal that the Alberta government is putting forward to the federal government in regard to the Crow benefit payout to our producers?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's very important that the farmers of Alberta know what it is that the provincial government is working with the farm organizations of Alberta to try and achieve. It's obvious that the Alberta farmers have not been treated fairly in this process, and I think there has to be a recognition of this. So what we're asking now is that five key points be considered. One, that a true historical average be developed. At the present time, one year, 1994, is the historical average that's being used. We're asking for anywhere from a five- to 10-year average to be incorporated to truly reflect the historical average of movement of grain. Two, that the distribution is paid to the producer, not just to the landowner. It's critical; it's the producer that's going to be paying the cost of this. Three, that forages be included in the process. That is critical. Four, that consideration be given to irrigated acres and, five, that a fair and proper usage of the \$300 million transition fund be allocated.

Mr. Speaker, it's very unfortunate . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order please. [interjection] Order please. [interjections] Order. Perhaps the minister will be able to conclude the information in the supplemental question.

Final supplemental. Final supplemental question, hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't help but not hear.

THE SPEAKER: Well, if the hon. member hadn't been in conversation with the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, he might have heard.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Get your act together.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The hon. Member for Redwater could also keep his sound level down a little bit.

MR. McFARLAND: Since I couldn't hear, Mr. Speaker, what future action is this government going to take to ensure fair and equitable payout to our western producers, not the Liberals who don't care other than knowing where food comes from?

THE SPEAKER: That is a repetition of the first question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Visit by Federal Minister of Agriculture

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've just heard the minister of agriculture talk about the meeting that was held in Lethbridge with the federal minister of agriculture. This was a meeting set up by the city of Lethbridge, attended by 300 farmers, and they were to be provided with the opportunity to ask the federal minister about the impact of the budget on their operations and their industry. I would just like to ask the minister of agriculture: does the minister realize that his representative, the Member for Little Bow, demanded to be first on the list of questioners, asked a bunch of questions that were off topic, and left the meeting before hearing the concerns of the farmers? Is this his new style of consultation?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, this meeting came about as a result of the fact that the federal minister would not meet with me in Lethbridge, so the hon. Member for Little Bow represented me in Lethbridge.

I just want to make these points, Mr. Speaker. The following are the points that were made by the hon. Member for Little Bow, and I'll let the agricultural community decide whether these questions were fair questions or, as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is representing, improper questions. Was the Alberta historical average correct? Is the land to be paid for forages or not? Should irrigation be considered in this payment? Should the distribution be paid to the landowner or to the producer? Those were the questions the hon. Member for Little Bow asked. So if indeed those were inappropriate questions, then I'll let the agricultural community make that decision in Alberta.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, was it appropriate to use a government plane to fly the Member for Little Bow to Lethbridge to ask a few questions and not to stay around to hear about the answers, or did you just send him down there for lunch?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the questions are very consistent in that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East was just complaining that our member properly wanted to be able to ask his questions, so he was up there first. The reason the hon.

member was flying to Lethbridge in a government plane is that he also had a private member's Bill that same day, and it was very critical.

Mr. Speaker, it's very critical that the agricultural community be represented fairly in this province, not in a manner such as what's coming about from the opposition.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the minister again: why did he have his representative demand that the federal government allow Alberta to opt out of the Canadian Wheat Board when many farm groups and even this Legislature have asked the minister to conduct a plebiscite to clarify the changes farmers want in the Canadian Wheat Board?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been known since we did our consultative process in this province two years ago now that indeed the Alberta farmers generally support restructuring the Wheat Board. Why should we be conducting a plebiscite that's going to cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars when indeed we already know? Why does the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East not spend his time consulting with his hon. cousin in Ottawa and bringing forward the recommendations of his party as well? Why should we be having a plebiscite when we know that Alberta farmers want the Wheat Board restructured? Why should we be wasting our efforts? Perhaps the hon. member could better spend his time consulting with his hon. cousins in Ottawa.

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

AN HON. MEMBER: West is best.

MR. DUNFORD: The west is best; that's right.

Brooks Wildlife Centre

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge acts as a hub for the region in terms of people coming into our community and then branching out, similar perhaps to spokes in a wagon wheel, to various centres around southern Alberta. One of the concerns that we have in Lethbridge is regarding the Brooks pheasant hatchery, and I would like to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development about the status of the initiative to attempt to deal with the Brooks pheasant hatchery.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see someone from Lethbridge who's concerned about agriculture. I think that's critical.

Mr. Speaker, the Lethbridge pheasant hatchery plays a critical role, an important role in the development of items such as tourism, agriculture-driven activities, so it is with this that we indeed have tried to formalize a process to allow the ongoing operations of the Brooks pheasant hatchery. The whole process was publicly tendered last fall. Twenty applications came forward to review the package that was presented. From these 20 requests we are now down to four actual groups who have shown keen interest and a desire to continue with the development of the pheasant hatchery. We're now in the final stages of developing the process, and indeed we'll be advising the one that's successful and those who were not successful very shortly.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Would the minister advise as to whether any tourism studies took place in relation to this overall initiative that is being undertaken?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The pheasant hatchery was originally designed to enhance tourism potential and abilities in this province. Indeed with that component in mind, 35,000 pheasants are released every year to attract pheasant hunters and to allow for an industry to grow and to continue to develop. Studies have been done, and indeed the true value of the tourism potential of pheasant hunting has been recognized. The intention is to enhance the opportunities through this privatization process, and I look forward to the day when the pheasant hatchery will be privatized. We've made a long-term commitment and an ongoing commitment that there will be pheasant release for the long term, and that is something that we have in our package as well.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Just a final supplemental: can the minister assure us that this will be put to bed, so to speak, in time for the 1995 hunt?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that's our hope and that's our intention. Obviously the spring season is coming forward very quickly, and it's important that we allow for the release of the pheasants, that we allow for the process to carry on in a formal process. It is our hope and our intention to meet with the final proponent and to finalize this deal as soon as possible. It is our hope indeed that a sale will be a reasonable outcome of this whole transaction.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Human Rights Commission

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has conducted in the last six months a number of opinion polls. Those polls included questions about the future of the Alberta Human Rights Commission. My question is to the hon. Premier. How many Albertans in his poll thought that the Alberta Human Rights Commission should be made independent of his government?

MR. KLEIN: I really don't know, Mr. Speaker, and that's the honest-to-God truth, but I will have the hon. Minister of Community Development respond. Perhaps he has more information than I do.

MR. MAR: I don't recall, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Well, since the poll, Mr. Speaker, was paid for by Alberta taxpayers, why have the poll results been concealed, not only from members of this Chamber but from all Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that there would be absolutely no reason in the world for concealing that kind of information. Indeed if it has been concealed, then it's been concealed from me as well, because I'm simply not aware of the

findings of the poll. If the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has some information or some idea as to what that poll says, perhaps he can share it with me.

I can tell the hon. member that I get a lot of letters on the Human Rights Commission, as I do on virtually every other issue. There are some who want to see changes. There are some who want to see it stay the same as it is today. There are some who are concerned that perhaps the authority of the commission will be watered down through consolidation and amalgamation. I read those letters and try and answer those concerns as best as I possibly can, but I think that the minister overall has given Albertans assurances that the Human Rights Commission will remain and that it will remain as a strong commission.

MR. DICKSON: Well, to those Albertans that aren't assured by representations by the minister, while we wait for the Premier's freedom of information Bill to take effect, will he commit that every poll undertaken by the government and paid for by Alberta taxpayers will be made available and free and open?

MR. KLEIN: I have no problem with that. That kind of information, Mr. Speaker, is gathered so that government will know how to react to the wishes and the needs of the electorate. Relative to this particular poll, I'll be glad to see if I can track it down and discuss it with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Disabled Persons' Programs

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I received a letter from a constituent whose son was born with cerebral palsy resulting in both mental and physical disability. Recently he has also been diagnosed with a mental illness. His mother is concerned about whether he will continue to receive services from social services or if the Department of Health will now be responsible for providing him services. I understand that this condition is referred to as dual diagnosis and is fairly common. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: what services can his department offer this young man and his family, and will they change as a result of his most recent diagnosis?

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

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Services to a person with disabilities is a large portion of my department's responsibility of course. We spend over \$400 million annually on this particular project. Without knowing the exact details of the case, I can tell the member that we have, no doubt, several programs that would assist individuals in this particular position. The assured income for the severely handicapped, for an example - we have over 16,000 individuals in that particular program right now - assists individuals of this nature. In addition to that, many disabled Albertans now have an opportunity to receive financial assistance and personal supports to live independently in their own communities.

I want to assure this member that I will look into this situation in detail and give him some answers.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. My supplementary question is to the Minister of Health. In light of the diagnosis of mental illness

can the Minister of Health advise what services her department will be able to offer to this individual?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I've been made aware of this person's concern, and I am writing directly to the individual, to the family to respond in that particular instance.

Mr. Speaker, I think the question, though, does bring forward the issue of services and streamlining services so that our people who require services have easy access. We do have methodologies to treat illness and injury, and we do have community supports to help people that have disabilities. What we haven't had in the past is the ability to bring those together and to work in a combined form. The Minister of Family and Social Services and I and other ministers have worked very closely to ensure that we do bring those resources together so that when an individual needs more than one service, they have, as we might say, one-window shopping or a one-window approach to receiving those services.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. Also to the Minister of Health: how will the proposed community supports model affect the supports that this individual would have?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the community supports model was designed precisely to respond to this type of problem and to co-ordinate the programs that might be in several departments into one area. Although the program may stay with the department, the co-ordination can occur at one level. There can be a single point of entry, a one-window approach, where a client can come for services and maybe receive them from a variety of departments but not have to search for them. We can also co-ordinate the entrance requirements, the eligibility criteria for these programs and make access much easier. So we look to the community supports model as being a real advantage to people with multiple needs.

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

2:30 Team Alberta Jackets

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta taxpayers are fed up with the misuse of public funds. Even so, the Minister of Community Development admitted that the blue and orange Team Alberta jackets that he distributed at the 15th Canada Games in Grande Prairie were in fact paid for with taxpayer dollars. Albertans also know that the official colours for Team Alberta as printed in the games handbook do not include the colour orange. My question is to the Premier. Since taxpayer dollars were used for political purposes, will the Premier do the honourable thing and ask the PC Party to reimburse Alberta taxpayers for the cost of these blue and orange jackets?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why the hon. member would be so upset with a little bit of orange being on those jackets. The fact is that these athletes would get team jackets anyway, so why should the PC Party reimburse the government for the cost of those jackets? That was all part of the government's sponsorship of those wonderful, wonderful games in Grande Prairie.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I would like to point out to this hon. member, who's from Edmonton, who is a great supporter of Edmonton, that orange and blue are indeed the colours of the Edmonton Oilers. Nothing wrong with that.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: That may well be, but I don't see any contributions going to the Edmonton Oilers from taxpayers from members opposite, and neither should there be.

To the Minister of Community Development: since it costs more to manufacture a four-colour jacket than it does a three-colour jacket, how much more did it cost Alberta taxpayers to add this political colour, orange, to these particular jackets?

MR. KLEIN: I'll take it as a supplement.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, in fact there is no incremental change in the cost. In the old uniforms there was a pink highlight instead of an orange highlight. What we do following each games is conduct surveys of our athletes and coaches and officials. Following the 1992 games, there was some dissatisfaction with the use of the pink, so the athletes and the coaches and the officials felt that the orange was a much better colour. As a result, in conducting a survey with our athletes, some 95 percent of them expressed a great deal of satisfaction with their performance at the games.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: To the same minister: I wonder if he could tell us who authorized the donation of these blue and orange jackets, paid for by taxpayer dollars, to Tory MLAs and to their spouses?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, all of those members representing government in official capacities at the Canada Winter Games in Grande Prairie received jackets. Those other ones, those other MLAs or executive assistants or other individuals that have those jackets paid for them.

MR. KLEIN: I received a jacket, and I was so very, very proud to wear it, as was my wife, at the opening ceremonies. As a matter of fact, we were the only politicians on the podium dressed in the colours of the Alberta team, and I wore those colours with great pride, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. [interjections] Order. [interjections] Order.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's the first day of spring, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Well, that's the answer. The Chair has been advised that this is the first day of spring.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First day of spring or a full moon: I'm not sure which.

Education Funding

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, over the past year I've spent a great deal of time meeting and talking with parents who have children attending schools within my riding. Many parents are pleased with the steps our government has taken to drive more resources to the classroom, yet some parents still have concerns about the ways in which local school boards are adjusting to such measures. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, could you please indicate the total number of dollars that school boards should be directing to the classroom with the implementation of the administrative cap?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly one of the key directions of the new funding framework for education starting in September of 1995 is to emphasize dollars to instruction. For the coming year approximately \$1.878 billion is available in the instruction block for schools across this province. That compares with approximately \$1.821 billion in this current year. So while, yes, school boards across the province are dealing with a modest but nevertheless last year of reductions in funding, about 1.6 percent across this province, there has been that shift of a positive nature to instructional funding in the coming year.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the new funding framework how do we ensure that the dollars designated for special-needs children reach those children who need it most?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly I would think that when school boards across this province are setting their priorities in terms of programming and service to students for the coming year, special-needs students would be at or near the top of their list in terms of their priorities. In the funding framework there is some additional flexibility for school boards, as school boards have said they wished, in terms of the allocation of dollars.

With respect to high special-needs students there is approximately \$8,900 identified for those students plus the regular per student amount. Secondly, for other special-needs students in what is often referred to as the mild and moderate category, we have rolled the tens of millions of dollars that were there before into the instructional block. It is still there, and there is that flexibility for school boards to provide the best possible program to all students in the province, including special-needs students.

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, it's very hard to hear what people are saying.

THE SPEAKER: Order.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, if parents are finding that the local school boards are not meeting their child's needs, what avenues are open for them to pursue?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to emphasize that I think that generally speaking across this province school boards do have as their first priority providing the best possible programs, allocating the greatest amount of money possible to the instruction of students. I do think that is the general view of school boards across the province.

With respect to what the recourse is if parents feel they are not getting the proper program for their students, certainly the first avenue of approach is, I think, to talk to the principal, talk to the people at their local school to find out what resources have been made available to the school; secondly, to make representation to the members of their school board, who are their duly elected representatives. In those cases where the matter cannot be resolved at these levels, then there is an appeal mechanism to the minister provided for in the legislation of this province.

head:

Members' Statements

2:40

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

Gambling

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take a moment to tell you about my home community of Villeneuve. Villeneuve is a small hamlet northwest of St. Albert. The church in Villeneuve holds two bingos a year to support all kinds of programs within and around our parish. The athletic association has eight cabarets a year which support the hall in the community. The Knights of Columbus hold a funny-money casino to help with special projects like the new meeting room off the church. Now, I ask: how long will the wonderful community of Villeneuve thrive when 30 miles down the road in Enoch a privatized, Las Vegas style casino flashes its lights and people from all over go to spend money in the 51st state of America, Alberta, Little Las Vegas? You see, aside from the very real concerns of individuals becoming addicted to gambling, people losing life savings, the breakup of families, and the increase in crime, I am also worried about the detrimental effect this will have on community life. What will this do to communities like Villeneuve, Carrot Creek, Mundare, Olds, Grimshaw, and other centres when they are unable to gather together to raise funds to fulfill a need or work on a project?

People have to work and play together to make healthy communities an extension of healthy families. As this government continues on its immoral road of gambling at any cost as long as the budget is balanced, I want this province to know that we Liberals strongly object to the Americanization of Alberta and the crippling effects that gambling will have on every single person in this province.

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

Mathematics Instruction

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to offer a commentary on the evolution of teaching math through what we call the vehicle of story problems, and I want to give my apologies in advance to James Jackson.

Picture, if you will, the 1960s. The problem: a logger sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His cost of production is four-fifths of this price. What is his profit? Now we move to the early '70s. The problem: a logger sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His cost of production is four-fifths of this price, or \$80. What is his profit? And now, Mr. Speaker, the new math of the late '70s. The problem: a logger exchanges a set L of lumber for a set M of money. The cardinality of set M is 100, and each element is worth one dollar. Make 100 dots representing the elements of set M. The set C of the cost of production contain 20 fewer points than set M. Represent the set C as a subset of M, and answer the following question. What is the cardinality of the set P of profits? Now, in the 1980s, the problem: a logger sells a truckload of wood for \$100. His cost of production is \$80, and his profit is \$20. Your assignment: underline the number 20. In the 1990s, the problem: by cutting down beautiful forest trees, a logger makes \$20. What do you think of this way of making a living? And the topic for class participation: how did the birds and the squirrels feel?

Mr. Speaker, the foregoing was delivered in the spirit of satire. However, it does provoke some interesting rhetorical questions. Number one, are the measurable results of math instruction considerably better today than in the 1960s? Equally important, is the logger more environmentally responsible today than in the 1960s?

Thank you.

Retention of Physicians

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, many areas of Alberta are experiencing health care difficulties as health care dollars shrink. The community of Fort McMurray is no different. In addition, however, in Fort McMurray we are experiencing an exodus of medical practitioners from the community. This has become of serious concern to the residents of Fort McMurray and should be of concern to all Members of this Legislative Assembly, irrespective of the party and irrespective of their views on the issue concerning health care funding. Rather than discuss this afternoon the issues of why doctors are leaving, I would like to use this time in this private member's statement to outline what I think are five strategies to encourage doctors to stay in Alberta and to stay in rural Alberta, where getting them is difficult.

The first strategy, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Health could do, by moving with lightning speed if she wished to do so, would be to put communities like Fort McMurray that are experiencing a doctor shortage with those communities that are entitled to a special medicare levy.

The second thing that she could do is guarantee freedom of movement for doctors from rural Alberta so that when they wanted to come to the large cities, they could do so.

The third thing she could do is that she could revamp those open-ended contracts that appear to lead members of the medical community to conclude that they could be fired at will and forced to relocate out of rural Alberta after they make the commitment to rural Alberta.

The fourth thing that she could do is consider some additional funding to regional health care units who are experiencing difficulty in attracting doctors so they could use those additional funds for the purpose of attracting doctors.

Last, but not least, this Legislative Assembly, the Department of Health, and the Minister of Health could indicate once and for all to our medical practitioners in this province that we value them dearly, that they are part of the solution and not part of the problem.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Member for Little Bow has indicated that he wishes to rise on a point of order. Before recognizing the hon. member, the Chair wants to apologize to the hon. member for mistakenly accusing him of not paying attention. The Chair now understands that he was trying to pay attention too carefully by having his head lowered towards his microphone in order to hear what was happening in this rather noisy Chamber at the time.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives." The Member for Lethbridge-East made some comments earlier that I had gone down to Lethbridge and been basically inconsiderate in not listening to the answers provided by the federal minister of agriculture in response to questions that I had posed to him. I want to assure this Assembly and you, Mr. Speaker, that I can think for myself when I go down and ask a federal minister of agriculture questions which I knew the vast majority of Alberta producers were wanting to ask the federal minister. I had, for clarification, explained two times to the organizer and to Mr. Goodale when I first arrived that I had to leave early, that I would be asking questions and would be leaving immediately afterwards. I don't need a ministerial flunky coming up and giving me an

etiquette lesson on how to listen to an answer. As I tried to listen to a 10-minute response to a very simple series of questions from the federal minister, I tried to be as respectful as I could and eased myself off the stage to get my coat, at which time I came back to the table nearest the head table, where the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East was sitting. I stood and waited while he explained his answer, and then I left. I had no time left.

Mr. Speaker, the second point that I would like to make is that I did leave, but it was after I listened to the minister's response. I did not, as the Member for Lethbridge-East said, make certain demands on the federal minister. I noticed that his questions came out of a letter to the editor in the *Lethbridge Herald*. In it he says:

McFarland showed total disregard for positive or constructive discussion when he began by demanding answers to questions that most everyone knew were issues being negotiated – such as the proportion of the total \$1.2 billion Western Grain Transportation Act payout which will come to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, clarification: \$1.6 billion, unless he knows something the federal minister has told him that we don't know, hasn't suddenly become \$1.2 billion. I gave as an alternative to Mr. Goodale the possibility that they could pass federal legislation to enable Alberta to get out of the designated Canadian Wheat Board area rather than his federal proposal, which was for Alberta to legislate renegotiation of landowner/renter contracts.

I at no time demanded anything. I provided a constructive alternative to the federal minister, and I would like an apology.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that if you check the Blues, you'll see that in the question I posed there was no reference to the member not staying to listen to the answers of Mr. Goodale. I said he did not stay to listen to the answers to the concerns raised by the farmers in their questions to the minister, and on that basis I see no reason for an apology. The issues that were raised by the member were totally not consistent with the focus that was set for the group, where the farmers in the community were supposed to be allowed to ask questions of the minister, ask him what his budget meant in terms of their implications, and ask the minister from Ottawa what they could do to get further participation.

2:50

The member knows that the payout mechanisms are still being negotiated. He knows that those kinds of things are going on. To try and convince this Legislature that he was down there because the minister of agriculture could not get in contact with the federal minister – I just can't believe that, Mr. Speaker. The minister of agriculture in question period admitted that he had spoken with the federal minister after the budget on the evening that the address was given. He had a telephone call with him.

What we're doing is seeing a conflict here. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't feel that I need to apologize. I stated the facts, and that's it.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair does have a copy of the Blues, which does indicate the situation as indicated by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East where it says, "and left the meeting before hearing the concerns of the farmers." Therefore, on the fine point of the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Little Bow, the Chair can't find in his favour, but the Chair can certainly understand how the hon. Member for Little Bow may have thought he heard something else quite legitimately, in view of the noise level in this Chamber at the time. Both hon. members have had the chance of clarifying their positions, and the Chair will let it go at that. [interjections]

Order. Order. Perhaps hon. members can use Members' Statements for the next week or 10 days to carry on this debate in a more orderly way if they've got points to raise about the abolition of the Crow benefit.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has indicated he wishes to ask the Assembly for unanimous consent to move a motion.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Dickson:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize March 21, 1995, as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I think a copy of the motion has been circulated. Now, speaking to the urgent and pressing necessity, this is a single day of the year recognized internationally as the Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I recognize that my office sent notice yesterday that I wished to do this today. I then received notice from the minister, a copy of his ministerial statement, but, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members, that was two speakers, a limit of two minutes per speaker. I think there's not a single member in this Chamber who thinks that the important issue of ending racial discrimination warrants only four minutes of the time of this body. [interjection] I can see that the Government House Leader for sure is going to want to get involved, because he's already joining in debate.

The point is this, Mr. Speaker. I think that in the four minutes we didn't have an opportunity to deal with some of the very positive initiatives undertaken by the Minister of Family and Social Services dealing with aboriginal Albertans. The Premier has shown some particular involvement with cultural organizations, multicultural organizations. I would think all members would want to ensure that those contributions by the Premier and the Minister of Family and Social Services could be put on the record when we look at this bigger but very important issue of promoting tolerance and understanding.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Is there consent in the Assembly to allow the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to move his motion under Standing Order 40?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: There's not unanimous consent.

head: Orders of the Day

**head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order. As usual in committee stage, we ask that only one member be standing and speaking at a time.

Bill 203
Family Day Amendment Act, 1995

THE CHAIRMAN: We have before the committee this afternoon Bill 203 proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and we would invite the hon. member to begin this afternoon's debate with that in mind.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to begin by thanking the members on both sides of the House for supporting Bill 203 at second reading. The Family Day Amendment Act has received a lot of media attention, which has certainly increased the profile of this Bill and, I'm sure, the workload in all of your offices.

My interest in Family Day began in October of 1993, when I stood and asked the hon. Provincial Treasurer a question regarding the Family Day holiday. The question captured my interest, and I began to evaluate the merits and the drawbacks of this day. I questioned whether the true purpose of Family Day was being accomplished, and of course I questioned the economic ramifications of the holiday.

3:00

Over the last few weeks you, too, have been evaluating the pros and cons of Family Day. Some of those concerns with the principle behind Bill 203 stated how nice it was to have a day off in February and how much you and your constituents would miss that day. For those of you who need to have a day off in February, there are other options. Annual vacation days are meant just for that purpose. They give us a break from our daily routines, and of course they give us the opportunity to spend time with our families.

A few other members mentioned the increased revenue that some sectors receive from Family Day. While this is definitely the case, I would again like to point out that those benefits are limited to certain sectors. I have also heard a member from across the way mention that the Bill ignores Alberta families. This simply is not the case. In fact, I believe the whole intent behind Bill 203 concerns the future of our families in the province of Alberta. This Bill attempts to do its part in preserving tomorrow's families by behaving responsibly today.

At the same time, Bill 203 would still allow us to set aside a special day to reflect on the family. It would have us celebrate Family Day in the same manner that we celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day. I think everyone agrees that we as a society place a great deal of importance on these two days. Quite frankly, every day should be and could be Family Day. It is the ultimate responsibility of Alberta families to strengthen their relationships and to ensure family values. Albertans are the only people in a position to make an absolute difference in our own families.

I want to briefly touch on some of the arguments in favour of Bill 203. From the chairman of the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families we heard that even the United Nations did not feel that a day off was a critical part of how to help families on Family Day. From other members we heard about the cost to small businesses as well as to government, and we asked ourselves if we could justify a statutory holiday when cuts were being made to health and education, the first priorities of Alberta families. We've also heard that no provincial jurisdiction has more general holidays than Alberta. Finally, we heard that Bill 203 will allow us to continue to celebrate and promote the family.

Family Day was intended to encourage individuals to reflect on the importance of families, to celebrate the strengths, vitality, and

meanings of family, and to rededicate ourselves to our foundation. I maintain that all of these objectives can be met by celebrating Family Day on the third Sunday in February. I encourage you to make your decisions based on the feedback of your constituents and what you believe is in the best interest of our wonderful province.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is my first opportunity to speak to Family Day, although I already voted at second reading. I have to say that I've gone about my constituency and asked some of these questions about, number one, Family Day, and number two, about the drinking age, which I guess we'll get to later today maybe. But the Family Day one, I've got to tell you, is kind of divided half and half, much like this Assembly. I lean towards keeping the day personally, and I was just thinking of some of those reasons. You know, our public employees have had a rough time of it: some gone without severance packages; certainly they've had to change their contracts and lose 5 percent. I think a day in the middle of February when it's quite the doldrums – I mean, today is spring, so we forget about how gloomy February can be. Take that opportunity to take a time for families. Certainly I don't think this government's policy has much led to encourage strong families, which lead to strong communities, and I have real concerns about that. So why not take this day to get grounded, take some time for your family, and make sure it's a family.

I don't deny that every Sunday can also be a family day, but this is a day when we recognize families, and I think that's very important. Certainly in this day and age when people are extremely busy – often we have two working parents and children in all kinds of activities. I think to take that day in February to take stock and have a look at . . . [interjections] Not stock as in Stock; no thanks. I take that back. Surely I wouldn't take Stock anywhere. Oh, dear.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. House leaders, I know that we've already observed the full moon and the first of spring.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Chairman, I'll try to clarify that. I did not imply that I wanted to take the Minister of Labour absolutely anywhere. I am happily married and enjoy Family Day. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Where was I? Back to Family Day. Family Day has been quite a debated issue across this province. In fact, I even phoned some businesspeople in my community and said: "You know, what about your business?" Well, a travel agency and a tourist business quite appreciate that long weekend in winter. Certainly that's something that Alberta should be promoting, tourism, and during the winter is a time when we definitely do need to promote tourism across this province. I'm sure the Member for West Yellowhead will agree with that. He's talked to his constituents, and I'm sure they're most in favour of keeping Family Day.

I think this is a time in our province when families have been hit very hard with uncertainties: uncertainties in health care, uncertainties in education, uncertainties as to whether they'll even have a job in the next week or two or if they'll be let off without any severance. It's a time when families are feeling very uncertain, so if we can't take a day in the middle of the winter to

regroup, take the time to take stock of where we are – I had to do that again – and promote families and promote Family Day across this province, then certainly we're not doing justice to what makes Alberta such a strong province.

You know, we still have time in this next reading to maybe convince a few members to vote against this Bill and to keep Family Day where it is to encourage the strong families across this province to take the time to be with each other, regroup. We all know that strong families make strong communities, and ultimately strong communities make a strong province.

So with those few words I'm sure you're glad that I will be seated. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 203. If I had been asked to speak to this Bill two years ago, I would suggest that at that particular point I would have been in favour of the Bill. Today as I view it, I view it in a different light. I've listened to the debates in this House on the reasons why we should move in this particular direction, and the overriding concern, it would seem, is the fact that there is an employer cost that has to be dealt with. We have heard some debate on the balance of that employer cost as opposed to the dollars generated in the commercial sector. I don't think that we have a definitive handle on exactly which weighs in favour, but it is my contention that I would not nor do I think the other members of this House should let business determine how much time they would spend with their families. I remember the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek indicating that she had set Sunday aside as a very special day in her family's lives, and I would commend her for that. I would also suggest to that member that we can never have enough time with our children and our loved ones. Certainly Monday, in my view, creates that extra opportunity to grasp and embrace those particular precious moments with our families.

Two years ago as I viewed this holiday in Leduc, it was not one that a tremendous number of businesses or people stopped to celebrate or acknowledge. Today I would suggest that that particular approach has changed. We see very much in the city of Leduc activities – I am aware of some in Beaumont as well – that now are undertaken, and they are of a family nature or encourage families to participate. I think that's very desirable. In a world as fast paced as we live in today, it is my view that we should definitely capture every moment we can with our families. I recognize, Mr. Chairman, that there are some who are forced to work that day and cannot do that, but I would also submit that we should not deprive those who have the opportunity to capture those precious moments.

There certainly can be no doubt as I view the world unfolding here – and the government members I'm sure would agree – that the philosophy today is to ask families to assist more with the care of the extended family and their family members. We've all heard chats about early departures from hospitals, so that strength of family has to be there. We can expect and we see that the philosophy of the day is that we all have to be very accountable for our own actions. That, in my view, expands to being accountable to your family as well. So there's more of a demand and a need as we move into restructuring in Alberta today to have that family unit very much intact so they can provide the support and they can provide the love that's required to help families through some difficult situations and times.

3:10

Society today puts families under a great deal of stress, and if we can capture an opportunity where we create three days for families to come together – be it to go cross-country skiing, be it simply to leave their home to visit relatives and strengthen that bond, be it to go cycling for the day if you happen to live in that southern part of the province where it never snows or it doesn't stay too long – I think those are very exceptional moments and they should be captured. We should not be deprived of them. As I indicated earlier, I do not think that members in this House should let business or the commercial interest direct and decree when and how they shall spend their family time.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's critical, very critical as we move into the '90s, as we are, to increase and strengthen the family bond. It's very, very important that we strengthen the family. I would suggest there's an underlying difficulty in society today that is directly related to and the result of the breakdown of the family bonds. We know of cultures in this world where the family bond is very much a strength. I would suggest that a strength in family will be strength in happiness, strength in productivity, and strength in health.

So I would ask all members to give very, very serious consideration to removing this holiday Monday. If the overriding concern is the cost to employers, then let us go back, as one member indicated in this House, and view perhaps some of those other Monday holidays we have and ask if they have significance to Canadians or significance to Albertans. There's one that would pop into mind, and that is the May long weekend. Does it have significance in Albertans' lives or Canadians' lives today? Are we looking at the wrong holiday at this particular point? It would be very, very unfortunate, Mr. Chairman, if we were to diminish the opportunity we have to spend time with our families, and it would be very unfortunate to lose the focus of family by moving it to a Sunday. We have our Sunday holidays in Mother's Day and Father's Day, and certainly I think we all revere those.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we seem to have acquired a fair number of people who are standing and talking, albeit at a lower registry than sometimes.

MR. KIRKLAND: Mr. Chairman, I thought they were so riveted by my speech that they were on their feet to get closer and listen to me, but obviously that's not the case.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I think you've deducted very clearly that the family is extremely important; it is a factor or a segment of society that needs more massaging and more culturing. Certainly we need to strengthen the bonds, as I've indicated time and time again. We should not deprive families of the opportunity to come together and improve their relationships. If we undertake that, a strong family, as I indicated, generally is a very strong society. It relates to improved health and good, sound community efforts and volunteer efforts as a result of the expansion of the family unit and bond itself.

So I certainly would speak against the Bill as such and would ask all members to keep their families in mind and the precious few moments we have to spend with them. It should be particularly acute to the members of this Legislature, who spend so many hours away from their families.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to bring forward a couple of points now that we're at the committee stage. I had spoken in favour of this Bill at second reading, and I believe I was quite adamant and forthright in my reasoning, being, as you know, in support of business. I am pro-business. I don't make any apology for that. I realized that that position, though, might create a number of letters and phone calls to the constituency office, and while it did, Mr. Chairman, it certainly was not to the extent that I had assumed. There was good media coverage, certainly in the Lethbridge area, regarding this Bill. So I find, unlike a previous speaker, that I have no reason to change my position on this Bill at the present time.

I want to make a note though. Previous speakers – and it looks like it's starting again – were trying to talk about business as if it's their agenda for moving this day from Monday to Sunday. I would simply like to make my position on this known, and that is that there are two things about this that bothered me from the start and why I'm now standing in order to see it corrected.

The first one was the fact that it was business that was affected by the government's decision to make Family Day on the third Monday in February. I was very active with the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce over a number of years, and I do not recall any consultation that was made with our particular organization as to whether or not a holiday in the third week of February made any sense to the business community, to a very active tourism business in the city of Lethbridge, and also, then, to just the fact that businesspeople are also husbands, fathers, grandfathers. They are part of the family community as well. There was no consultation that I'm aware of with the group that I represented, and when in fact the holiday came into play, I was upset about it and made my thoughts known to the MLA that I had at that particular time but to no avail.

The other aspect of this is that I always felt it was extremely arrogant of a government to say that they were somehow enabled or empowered to pick a day out of the 365 days within a year and then designate it something like Family Day. Well, families have been around a lot longer than politicians. It seems arrogant – that is the word that I'm using today, and I feel comfortable with that word – in terms of making a general holiday and calling it Family Day. Now, I recognize that the day itself has attained a certain amount of meaning, so I'm not opposed, then, to the intent of this Bill in moving it to Sunday and calling it Family Day.

A last comment I would like to make is that while circulating through my constituency and talking to some people about this item because I wasn't getting the cards and letters and phone calls that I thought I would, a time or two there was the suggestion of a referendum. I'm not proposing that, and I'm not in favour of it. I want to be on the record, though, of having supported citizen initiatives and would continue to support that kind of a system in the future. But in terms of a government or, in this particular case, a private member coming forward with a position, just because of the fact that there seems to be some resistance to it, that we have to deal with it in a referendum seems to me not to be appropriate. I believe that 83 of us have been elected to represent our constituents in matters like these, and I'm quite comfortable in voting on this issue.

I feel very, very comfortable, Mr. Chairman, in voting for the passage of the Bill through the committee stage.

3:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead and then Medicine Hat.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Family Day Amendment Act, Bill 203, aims to take away one statutory holiday. The arguments, I think, go along the lines of: "One can celebrate Family Day on a Sunday. In fact, one can celebrate Family Day every day." Of course, as I think has been pointed out before by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the same argument applies to pretty well all of the stat holidays. So when you really boil it down to its basics, what this Bill purports to do is to take away one stat holiday. Let's forget about the particular reasons.

I consider this, quite frankly, a rather mean-spirited move, without wanting to imply that the originator of the Bill is at all mean-spirited, because of course that's not the case. But somehow this particular gesture I think is somewhat mean-spirited because it would take away that stat holiday and would lead to countless problems with people who have that particular holiday as part of their contracts. I think it's fair to say that those people who work under certain contracts already have enough trouble as it is to keep on working.

Now, union contracts, as we know, Mr. Chairman, are considered to be sacred by this government, at least at times when it suits them, I think is fair to say. But taking away this day would cause confusion in the ranks and would lead to renegotiation again on that particular score. So why is it, then, that this Bill, which has been sponsored by a member of the government side, is essentially a regressive kind of Bill, in my view? I'm referring also to other Bills that I would consider to be regressive: the reintroduction of the strap, the raising of the liquor age. I have difficulty with that because it all means that we're sort of dealing with symptoms of problems rather than with the underlying causes.

The other argument is that eliminating Family Day would save money; that is to say, eliminating it as a stat holiday. I think that's very debatable indeed. Mr. Chairman, I canvassed my riding far and wide, and I don't think it would come as a surprise when I say that the verdict was unanimous on this particular Bill. I received 28 phone calls all urging me to vote against the Bill. That included businessmen. It included union members. It included students, teachers. In other words, every sector of the community was represented. Obviously, I'll heed the directions of my constituents, and I will vote against this Bill.

Now, I should also mention that according to the businessmen, particularly in Jasper – and I think this has been mentioned before in connection with Banff – this weekend represents the best business weekend in the whole year. So it makes sense that they'd want to hang on to it.

I won't say too much, Mr. Chairman, about family values because I think, again, that the family and hanging on to it and celebrating it is so important and indeed could well be done all year and should be done every year. Those values should be illuminated by all of us, at this particular time more than ever I think, and especially, I would urge, by the government. The government should do whatever is within its power to foster the family unit.

That's the end of what I have to say. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to have an opportunity to speak to this Bill this afternoon. Unfortunately, with the time constraints that are in place for a private member's Bill, it's often difficult for all members to have

an opportunity to have some input on the Bill. So I'm glad, now that this Bill has reached the committee stage, that I do have an opportunity to speak.

I would like to approach this from a slightly different angle, Mr. Chairman. We have been focusing our discussion over the past few days primarily on the aspect of the statutory holiday. Everyone has been talking about losing a statutory holiday. I want to focus on the Bill and really look at what this Bill does and talk a little bit about Family Day and the fact that Family Day on a Sunday can be a very worthwhile endeavour. In fact, in my opinion, in many ways it could be more beneficial than what we have right now with having a Monday holiday.

I use for example Father's Day, Mother's Day. Anyone who works in the menswear business, the sporting goods business well appreciates the value that people place on Father's Day. Father's Day is a well-recognized occasion, and I don't think there are too many fathers in this province who are not recognized in some way on Father's Day, be it through the form of a gift – and I refer to the retail side – or I remember when we were younger, the children in our family on Father's Day would make a very important day of it: the breakfast-in-bed treatment, "Whatever you want to do, it's your day." I'd like to get into some fairly intimate details because I think it's important that committee members understand what we're doing.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I would now like to move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the Chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain Bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 203 and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions
Resource Project Revenues

504. Moved by Mr. Jacques:
 Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to set aside a portion of revenues generated by future resource projects for the purpose of developing and maintaining any infrastructure within the local community, thereby minimizing cost and inconvenience to local residents.

[Debate adjourned March 14: Mr. Bracko speaking]

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

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, there were a number of questions, before I go on with the motion in terms of my debate, that the hon. Member for St. Albert asked, and I would like to address a few of those. One of the questions that he had: are the dollars to help out the big companies, or are they there for the local municipalities, and what is meant by local community?

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I think this motion is designed to provide moneys to local municipalities who are now feeling the impact of the industry on their infrastructure without benefiting from the increased tax base. I guess just to quote the sponsor of the motion,

The type of infrastructure that we are targeting in this motion is generally referred to as transportation infrastructure, and more specifically . . . we are targeting roads and bridges.

That was the quote from the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. This also includes water and wastewater systems, and I think it should be very clear that that's basically what the motion is trying to address.

Today I would like to speak in favour of Motion 504 because I believe that some local communities around the province are not fully reaping the rewards of local resource projects. In fact, many communities are forced to bear an excessive burden when a resource project sets up in or near their community, and the burden is the strains on the budgets and the infrastructure of these local communities. Having quality infrastructure such as paved roads is important to Albertans and is far too often taken for granted. In some local communities near resource projects, however, quality infrastructure is frequently lacking. Many of my constituents feel that natural resource projects, while providing jobs to some local residents and increasing the tax revenues of some communities, often take more out of the community than they put in. These projects place such a strain on local infrastructure and budgets that administrators of these areas cannot keep up. Their budgets are too tight to afford to develop and maintain the infrastructure required in and around their jurisdictions regardless of the benefits from the project.

I would like to give a number of examples, and the first two are the communities of Peerless Lake and Trout Lake, rich both in oil and forest resources. This is an area, of course, of high resource extraction because of the oil and forest industries being active in the area surrounding the communities. However, little goes into these communities. There are major problems with roads. In fact, we've just upgraded the previous winter road to secondary status, not without a lot of convincing, I may add. Because of tight budgets the upgrade is a short-term solution. When the resource companies are finished in the area, what's left of the road will probably not even support the residents of the area. When these types of projects were introduced into the communities, they were supported wholeheartedly, thinking that the communities would be able to build up their infrastructure. Unfortunately, the benefits of the tax base don't go directly to the communities affected; they go to another level of government. That government as a matter of course allocates that money to the areas of greatest population. In these small communities in the north the need for infrastructure is so great, but because they are so small, they are not high on the priority list. Resource projects should contribute to the growth of local communities, not take away from them. Host communities and especially adjacent communities often lose out from having resource projects in their backyards.

Another problem is inadequate water or wastewater systems and other parts of their infrastructure which cannot sustain the community let alone a large industrial operation. This lack of suitable infrastructure is why many communities have been calling on the government to set aside funds for the development and maintenance of the required infrastructure in their communities. The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and the Rural & Improvement Districts Association of Alberta have been urging the province for years to put some sort of a system

in place which would prevent municipalities from incurring this net loss from resource projects. While no other jurisdiction in Canada has a system such as this in place, Alberta can and should lead the way. As a province so abundant in natural resources, we should be the first to implement a program which would allow local communities to provide quality infrastructure to support a local resource project.

So far our approach to infrastructure funding has been fairly ad hoc. When a proposal is made to the government, the specifics would be dealt with on a project-by-project basis, but as budgets tighten, industries claim they cannot afford to pay for required infrastructure development and maintenance. The budgets of the local municipalities have to bear the infrastructure costs associated with the resource project. Local residents are paying the same or higher taxes yet are receiving infrastructure which is sometimes substandard. Their local roads, for example, wear out prematurely, and there's no room in their budgets for maintenance.

One of the most prevalent examples of this is the community of Garden River way up north in my riding. This community has had no road. Logging was very active in the area for a number of years until the federal government called off all activity within Wood Buffalo national park. A corduroy road was built to allow for the removal of resources, and once there was no more hauling, no one maintained the road. No one wants to take responsibility for developing or building this road now that the resource has almost been totally extracted. Had there been money set aside for this, it would not be difficult to get the department to pen a letter of support for this. Imagine a community in this wonderful province of ours that actually doesn't have a road into it or out of it. The estimated cost of building a road, of course, for this community is approximately \$10 million. In this time of fiscal restraint you can imagine the difficulty in finding money for infrastructure development.

Surrounding communities are also hard hit by the resource project using their infrastructure. Trucks travel through their communities but provide little or no benefit to that community by way of revenue. Other examples, Mr. Speaker, are the towns of High Prairie and Slave Lake in my constituency. In both cases these towns provide a great deal of the infrastructure to support resource projects. Around Slave Lake there have been a number of oil and forestry projects, but very little of the revenue flows to Slave Lake for developing the infrastructure needed to accommodate the growth in the area. The agreements in place do not meet the needs, and the taxpayers of this town are always dinged along the way. In High Prairie this is also true, with the new Tolko Industries plants located just outside of town within the boundaries of the MD of Big Lakes. The majority of the people employed in the area live in town and make use of the facilities available there. This is well recognized, yet the increase to the tax base goes to the improvement or municipal district that the project is located in. This leaves both towns to deal with the fast rising infrastructure costs without the benefit of additions to the tax base. Although they receive some funds from municipal agreements, the distribution of the gains from resource extraction does not amount to much.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we should put an end to this. The government should initiate a program which looks at each municipality to see what the effects of their projects have been, are, and will be in the future. More specifically, this motion is to deal with future projects, not the ones that have been in the past. Then we can make a decision based on which municipalities will be hardest hit by the resource project development. I don't

think a broad policy which gives infrastructure money to all municipalities will work. Some don't need the money, but others do. We need to see which communities are hardest hit and then attempt to address those concerns.

Programs which give revenue to local jurisdictions have been implemented successfully in some states, and I just want to give some examples here. One such state is the state of Oregon. Although they use a tax and allow the funds to be used for whatever the receiving community wants, it is along the same principles of what Alberta should look at as a way to ensure that its local communities do not unduly suffer from having a resource project nearby. Oregon has a timber tax which is designed to have the state impose a nominal severance tax and give the revenues, less administration costs, back to the local districts to reduce their tax burden. The Oregon program utilizes the same broad principle that I picture for Alberta. The state collects the taxes or royalties, puts them into a general revenue fund, and gives some funds back to the local community to ease the burden on their budgets.

If we adopt such a policy, the mechanism will exist to allow for the compensation of resources leaving the local area. The community is compensated for the resources being taken out of the area, and this is what I believe Alberta's communities need, Mr. Speaker, for any future projects that we have planned. They need a program which will compensate them for the loss of potential future gains. In the interests of job creation today, some local communities are selling resources without having sufficient financial resources to build the infrastructure needed in the long term. Taking a portion of the revenues received from new resource projects and giving it back to the communities allows local residents to continue paying at normal taxation levels for the same or better level of infrastructure than they would have without the projects. That is why I believe that this motion is very important for Albertans. We need to ensure that our local communities are not unfairly treated and can maintain a certain standard of living.

Resource projects provide a considerable economic boom to many communities, and some communities never look back after a project has come to town, which I think is why most of them support projects such as this. But many communities do not have the tax base to support the constant demand for infrastructure funds, and their ratepayers should not have to pay more, just because a project locates nearby, without getting any of the benefits that they should get.

3:40

That resource being extracted has an obvious value attached to it when it leaves the community. So it's so important, Mr. Speaker, when you're looking at this specific motion – and to quote the 1977 NADC publication *Economic Development in Northern Alberta*: business enterprises need infrastructure – roads, water, sewer, railways, airstrips, land, medical services, to name a few; the existence or promise of infrastructure can heavily influence industries to locate in certain areas; conversely, a lack of such structure can also keep industry out.

It is up to us here in this House to ensure that a debilitated infrastructure is not the result of a resource project arriving in a community. Something lasting and more permanent should be left behind. Local residents of host communities deserve better, and we can provide that through this motion.

The relatively small amount of funds that government would have to allot to these communities would be of great benefit to the local residents from the resource projects, Mr. Speaker. They could afford quality infrastructure and maintain the way of life

they can get accustomed to. No matter where we live in the province of Alberta, no one should be denied the infrastructure development that other places do get.

So I urge all members of this Assembly to vote for Motion 504. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by commending the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for authoring this motion and the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for supporting it. I'm sympathetic to this particular motion, of course, being from a resource-based area where we have run into the problems that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake has so aptly described. I should mention first off, though, that this is yet another example – this is for the benefit of the House leader, who always wants us to use our positive, constructively critical facilities – that again I'm being very positive, because I support a motion that originates on the other side of the House. I'm all in favour of this motion because, as the Member for Lesser Slave Lake has stated, the problems that arise particularly in infrastructure are many and varied.

I do have a couple of points that I would like to have cleared up. It will not make any difference to my concurrence with the motion in the long run, but I just want to be a little bit more clear on some of the terms. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake has explained that infrastructure is to be the so-called hard infrastructure, particularly bridges and roads and the like. I still find it a little hard to understand why this particular motion would refer to only those types of hard infrastructure and not to – I don't know whether they're hard or soft – things like schools, fire protection, that kind of stuff, because they all cause problems in all these fields whenever there is a new mine opening up or what have you. So that's one item that I would like to be considered.

The term "resource project" I find still vague, because of course it could include anything having to do with coal, forestry, I would imagine, which would not be all that labour-intensive but would still have, in the case of the Hinton area, I think about 10 employees, and so on and so forth. Where do we draw the line, in other words, is what I'm asking. Also, the term "local community" I still have some difficulty with. I know of one mine which is perched almost right smack between Hinton and Edson. Half the workers live in Edson and half in Hinton. What do we do there, in that particular case?

Then the motion refers to inconvenience to a local community. That, too, I think is something that could be clarified a little more as well as a very important item: that the motion will help to offset any costs to municipalities if the project is successful. Now, what happens if the project is not? Say after 10 years the thing goes belly up; then what happens? I think we have ample examples of that; for instance, in the case of MagCan near High River.

In the final analysis though, Mr. Speaker, I'm in favour of the motion, but I would like to see the terminology defined more clearly, if this ever comes to a Bill.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to be able to speak in favour of Motion 504. I'm very pleased to address an issue that is important to many of my

constituents and, I'm certain, many other Albertans. I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for presenting this motion.

Communities which are located close to resource projects often don't realize many of the economic benefits from them, but they end up providing a significant portion of the infrastructure and the related costs. Our natural resources have made Alberta stronger and wealthier and able to maintain government services without providing taxes such as a sales tax, but the benefits are not always returned in proportion to input and local costs. Some communities near the resource projects actually suffer from having a project in their backyard. The use of heavy vehicles and equipment to service a project often places a burden on the infrastructure not designed for the type of heavy use that they receive.

Many of our secondary highway networks were originally designed for light to moderate traffic, and some of these roads now face heavy traffic daily by heavy vehicles transporting materials to and from the plant sites. The constant use places a heavy toll on the roads, causing them to deteriorate quite often to unacceptable levels. Over time these roads have to be upgraded or rebuilt, and all too often the money to do this comes from the local municipalities while the significant economic benefits go to central urban areas, where the refineries and other value-added plants tend to be located. Even with additional funds received from the tax revenues and assessments, some budgets from the local municipalities just cannot afford to handle the strain.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, it's not just the hub municipality that needs to support a resource project. Many adjacent communities can also be affected. In fact, these are frequently the communities which fare the worst from a resource project moving into a certain area. The surrounding communities often receive little if any direct economic benefit from the project. Heavy trucks and machinery pass through their communities on a regular basis, prematurely aging their roads. The increase in traffic usually is not offset by any similar increase in the level of economic activity in these communities nor by an increased assessment.

The purpose of this motion is to place some equity into the system and recognize the input and costs to a host municipality for helping to provide a resource revenue which the whole province then shares. Mr. Speaker, there's a community in my constituency called Zama City. It generates millions of dollars each year for the provincial coffers from oil and gas and timber resource revenue, yet the province does not even provide one road into the community. The residents and the people that work there are not work crews that fly in and out on shift. These are people who live there year-round, whose children go to school there, and they often travel daily 50 miles on a private gravel road. This road was built by the resource companies for access and now is the only road into the community. There's nothing wrong with industry building the first roads, but as areas like these prove themselves and especially when they prove their revenue potential to the province, I think we owe something to the communities, something so basic as a simple access road of a decent standard. I don't believe it's unreasonable to put aside a small portion of the revenue derived from the resources in any area to help build some of the regional infrastructure. What we're talking about here is a proactive approach to resource development.

3:50

There is another way but one which I feel is quite negative. Tax-starved Ontario, for example, puts regulations in place to prevent trucks from running on Crown highways unless the company pays for damages that they're estimated to inflict on the

road. To me, this doesn't make any sense relative to a good investment climate. That's not to say that industry should get a free ride, nor to pay any of the cost, but it should be a shared responsibility. We should be looking at structure that promotes good maintenance programs rather than the later and often more expensive repair programs. We should also avoid unduly taxing a company for choosing Alberta as a place to invest.

This motion is about allowing communities to get some return for helping to sustain business investment in Alberta. It's about recognizing the costs and efforts of the host and surrounding communities, and I believe it's about economic growth in Alberta. So I urge all the members of this Assembly to vote for Motion 504.

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I initially saw this motion, I must admit I was somewhat confused by its vagueness and what the intention was here. The previous two speakers from the opposite side gave me a little bit more insight, but I'm still kind of confused. Overall, I'm concerned that we're opening up a Pandora's box here with what this motion is trying to achieve.

The major claim seems to be that roads are being prematurely deteriorated, and I am sympathetic to that. Where's the money going to come from? A portion of revenues from future resource projects: well, it still isn't clear where these revenues are coming from. Is it going to be in the form of increased royalties? Is it going to be from the oil company? To me, that sounds like taxation, sounds like downloading, and I thought we weren't going to tax. I can't understand that. Does that mean we're going to have a shifting of the revenues that the province has in the GRF? Does that mean that we're going to say: okay, everybody's equal in this province, but we're just a little more equal because our roads are – I'm not sure what this means.

I'm not saying that they shouldn't have proper roads, but I think, just like we opened up a Pandora's box with this EEMA issue and now we have to deal with it or anything else that we've done in the past – and we're now spending time trying to fix past bad legislation – this is headed in that direction again. As one of my colleagues said: it's thought provoking but not very thoughtful. [interjection] Yes. The Member for Fort McMurray wants me to give him his credit.

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you opposed to this motion?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I'll get to that in a minute.

You know, I'm amazed at the two speakers, at how they have implied that having an oil company come into their area, into a town is a bad thing. What about the jobs that have been created? I don't remember when a small town that's been close to an oilfield has said, "No, we don't want the oil company to drill in there." They've welcomed them with open arms, as have, in most cases, the landowners and the storekeepers and everybody else on down the line.

"Future resource projects," what does that mean? What do we mean by "future"? If we have an oilfield and we've got three wells drilled and there are another 20 wells to be drilled there, is that part of the future? What is "resource projects"? Is it just oil companies? I suspect it might be, but maybe it means farming. Is that a resource project? Maybe a new farm is going to open up. [interjection] Yeah, a school. What does that mean? Is it

when somebody cuts timber off their own land? Is that a resource project? It seems like the members opposite were almost vague on purpose with this.

MS CALAHASEN: No. We didn't know we had to explain to somebody who had no understanding of real community.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Well, yeah. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake says that I have no understanding of real communities. I mean, maybe they'd like an NHL franchise in their town or something. I don't know.

What is an infrastructure program? I'm sympathetic to the fact that you need to have sewers, you need to have good roads and schools, but this motion here isn't clear as to what is the infrastructure.

Then we make reference to, I believe, an Oregon model. Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but when it's convenient, we go and get examples from other jurisdictions, and then when it's not convenient, we ignore it and we call it the Alberta advantage.

I just go back to this revenue thing. This thing bugs me. "Portion of revenues." My colleague from West Yellowhead alluded to this. What happens with money losing projects, where they do have revenues but they don't have any bottom line? I mean, these guys over here on the opposite side seem to know about bottom line. They're talking about revenues, so that means you could have an absolute financial disaster of a resource, quote, unquote, project, and it has to donate or contribute or allocate or whatever the word is a portion of the revenues in addition to the fact that it's not making any money. Well, it seems to me that would make the decision pretty simple: just pack up and leave.

I would like some clarification from the other side, and I gather we've got some more speakers coming on the other side. What industries are we targeting here? Is there anything specific in mind? Could we have a little more detail? Maybe with some more detail I might be convinced to support this motion, but right now, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. This is unbelievable that this would be brought forward at this point.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Westlock.

MS CALAHASEN: Okay. I guess I'll let him get up.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, she stood on a point of order. That's why he sat down.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair understood she withdrew her point of order; the hon. member withdrew her point of order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West wishes to continue?

MR. KOWALSKI: No. I want to give a speech.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Well, Mr. Speaker, I see the member from Slave Lake is offended by my comments.

AN HON. MEMBER: Lesser Slave.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Lesser Slave Lake.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Member for Calgary-West appears to have rekindled the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake's interest in the point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Section 23(h), (i), (j), (k). The member from Calgary obviously doesn't understand what he's talking about, and I think he should refer to the motion and try to understand it before he gets up and speaks.

Also, I'm not the member from Slave Lake; I am the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, for his information.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Well, I started off by saying that I am trying to understand this godforsaken Motion 504, which doesn't . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order. Hon. member, the Chair has listened rather attentively to what the hon. member has been saying, and the Chair apprehends that the hon. member really doesn't understand the motion before the Assembly. The hon. member should understand that this motion was proposed by a private member of the Assembly. It was not proposed by any government organization or any emanation of government. This is a private member's motion for discussion primarily by private members in the Assembly, and the hon. member should approach this matter in that vein.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

4:00

MR. DALLA-LONGA: With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, I never implied it was a government motion. I did say – I would like to repeat and clarify – that I am trying to understand what this motion is trying to say. Okay?

For the benefit of the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who accused me of not knowing her riding, I'm not from Calgary; I'm from Calgary-West.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Westlock.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. This motion this afternoon basically talks about revenue for local infrastructure, and in the history of Alberta there has been a variety of different alternatives utilized in dealing with this. If you look back to the 1930s in the province of Alberta, when the depression hit and just by coincidence the weather changed as well, you had a whole vast area of the province of Alberta called special areas created. Out of it came a unique form of governance, and a unique form of funding was provided by the central government in the province of Alberta for it. It's now the 1990s, and these special areas still exist on the map of the province of Alberta.

In the 1970s, Mr. Speaker, when major attention was provided to heavy oil deposits in northeastern Alberta, there had to be a new mechanism created in order to stimulate the growth and the creation of something today that we know as Fort McMurray. The mechanism, then, was the establishment of a special organization office called the northeastern Alberta commissioner, which basically allowed that particular entity, that particular organization to rally all the resources of not only the province of Alberta but the government of Canada as well and bring it all together and ensure that in a matter of a decade you could see a small, little hamlet of Fort McMurray transform itself into a city of 12,000 to 15,000 people; of course, just two decades later now some 30 some odd thousand people.

Mr. Speaker, in another part of the province of Alberta a commitment was made some two decades ago to allocate nearly \$1 billion for irrigation infrastructure. We've seen what has happened in terms of the reallocation of these resources. There has also been an attempt in the province of Alberta as well in the 1960s to basically look at the northern part of the province of Alberta – and again, euphemistically, referring to anything north of Highway 16 as being the northern part of Alberta, but we all know that northern Alberta does not begin for another 110 to 120 miles north of where the city of Edmonton is – and an entity called the Northern Alberta Development Council was established.

Perhaps by way of illustration I just want all members to visualize here within 120 miles of the city of Edmonton, to the north and the west of Edmonton, an isolated community higher above sea level than the town of Banff is, in the centre of the second oldest oil and gas play in the province of Alberta – Leduc being the first; the second oldest of course is Swan Hills – a community of 2,700 people, Canada's first centennial town created January 1 of 1967. This community sits in the middle of wilderness, for all intents and purposes. There was no organized municipality around it until January 1 of 1995. It was unorganized territory for nearly 40 miles in all directions around the community of Swan Hills.

The Swan Hills oil field, Mr. Speaker, since it was developed and created and founded, has extracted more than 1 billion barrels of oil. One billion barrels of oil has come out of that one field. One company alone, Home Oil, with its corporate head offices in Calgary, has taken out over 600 million barrels of oil. Now, if you were to say that a barrel of oil was worth \$20 and you calculated \$20 times 600 million, you would get a figure that would be quite astounding.

In addition to this isolated community – and all the oil and the gas is located around it – there is also a major processing field called Judy Creek, some 20 miles, 25 miles south of the community of Swan Hills. Mr. Speaker, in the early 1980s the province said that it wanted to establish something else with respect to a waste management system. It created something called the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation. The plant is located eight miles north of the town of Swan Hills, not in the community of Swan Hills.

So what you've got is a community of 2,700 people isolated, over a billion barrels of oil having been taken out of that field, a major gas and oil processing plant in Judy Creek, to the north of it an Alberta special waste management plant, that sometimes we refer to as the Swan Hills special waste management plant. But here we have an isolated community of 2,700 people with little or no internal tax base, Mr. Speaker. Distance: 70 miles to the nearest organized community or municipality of any significance, that being the community of Barrhead.

There has been a struggle from day one, when that community was created as a town on January 1 of 1967, so much so that in 1995 there is no high school in the community of Swan Hills. The high school students in Swan Hills, 100-plus of them, get on a bus each morning and drive to Barrhead, a 70-mile drive in the morning and a 70-mile drive in the evening. They have no high school, Mr. Speaker. There's been a struggle all the time to do that, yet at the same time Swan Hills has the youngest overall demographics in terms of population in the province of Alberta. The average age of a citizen in the town of Swan Hills is 16 years of age. The number of senior citizens in the town of Swan Hills is fewer than the number of fingers I have on one hand. There is no high school in Swan Hills.

There's been a struggle from day one to get hospital medical services in Swan Hills. When we finally agreed in the early 1980s to proceed with a hospital in the town of Swan Hills, I remember a Leader of the Opposition standing up in this Assembly and saying: "Well, why would they need a hospital? Why don't they just get in an air ambulance and travel 120 miles to Edmonton if something goes wrong?" In order to extricate 1 billion barrels of oil, you've got to have thousands and thousands of people working in an industrial hinterland where safety is a major concern, yet they are not supposed to have security and safety for themselves. Mr. Speaker, when we finally did get a hospital in Swan Hills, it was met with derision, because it happened to be in a particular constituency in the province of Alberta, rather than because there was a need for safety and security for the people there, coupled along with the fact that the average age of children in that community was 16 years or less.

It's been a struggle to get dental services in the community of Swan Hills, a struggle to get government services in the community of Swan Hills because the distance is north, south, east, and west. It wasn't until a few years ago that they even had a cemetery in Swan Hills. Members can laugh, but there's something very unique about grizzly bear country. If you want to build a cemetery in Swan Hills, you have to build a fence around the cemetery that goes down four and five feet because of those big, huge animals. You have to build fences down. Swan Hills is the last known resource of the Great Plains grizzly in western Canada. Mr. Speaker, it's quite a day in a community when you go up and there are hundreds of people who attend the opening of a cemetery – no one had ever been buried in the community – because of the uniqueness of it.

You cannot even subdivide land in Swan Hills, Mr. Speaker, because all the land around the town of Swan Hills is owned by the government of Alberta. The government of Alberta, the government that I'm a member of, says, "But the land is worth X thousands of dollars an acre." I mean, nobody buys and sells land within 40 miles of Swan Hills. There are no farmers. Yet the government mysteriously finds a definition for land that's thousands and thousands of dollars an acre so you can't even have a subdivision for the good people of Swan Hills.

Mr. Speaker, what this motion says is recognize the billions of dollars that come out of the hinterland around that particular community, not a taxation on industry. The province gets incredible amounts of revenues.

I remember exactly how the people of Swan Hills were repaid in spades too. A very unfortunate event occurred in 1980, Mr. Speaker. It was called the national energy program. The government of Alberta responded. A former Premier of the province of Alberta stood up and said: well, let's cut off the oil to those guys down east. Others stood up in certain municipal positions and said, "Let those guys freeze" or something like that. Two-thirds of all the oil cutbacks in Alberta at that time, which were roundly applauded by the citizens of Alberta with great patriotism, came out of one constituency in the province of Alberta. It was a constituency that I had the privilege of representing in 1980, and it's still a constituency that I have the privilege of representing in 1995. But the impact of the two-thirds oil reduction was a 25 percent depopulation of the community of Swan Hills within six months of the date of the announcement of this government.

There is need for recognition for local infrastructure for isolated communities, Mr. Speaker. It's wonderful when you live in an environment where you even have your back alleys paved. It's wonderful, too, when all the resource revenue comes in the GRF and it's redistributed to people all across the province of Alberta.

4:10

All this motion says is recognize that the people who live in these isolated communities, who do the work, who do carry the water, who do extricate the oil and the gas and the trees and everything else are just as worthy as any other citizen who simply finds his or her life subsidized by way of the money from the oil field there to pay for the LRT there, the money from the oil field there to pay for the coliseum there, the money from the oil field there to pay for the Saddledome there, the money from the oil field there to pay for the irrigation system there, the money from the oil field there to pay for the schools and the operas and the symphonies and everything else, Mr. Speaker. Those are Albertans worthy of respect, and I'm supporting this motion because this motion is important.

THE SPEAKER: Is there some time left? One minute.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville for one minute.

MR. VASSEUR: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't do justice to this issue in one minute, but I rise to support this motion. The Member for Barrhead-Westlock explained quite well that there are some specific problems out there not only in northern Alberta but in the remote communities of the province and that at times we have to seriously look at some special provisions to make sure that the amenities that are required in the communities are provided for. Not only in the riding of the previous speaker but in the northeast part of the province, it was very similar when the oil industry came into that area some 15 years ago. There were some of the amenities in the communities that were not provided as fast as they should have. It created a problem of growth that had to be addressed. There was some special assistance granted to the communities around the area because of the rapid growth situation that . . .

THE SPEAKER: The Chair sincerely regrets having to interrupt the hon. Member for Bonnyville, but the time allotted for this item has expired, and the Chair is required to put all questions required to dispose of the motion.

[Motion carried]

Health and Safety Standards

505. Moved by Mrs. Laing:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that health and safety standards are being met in all personal care facilities by establishing regulations and a comprehensive monitoring system.

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

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 505 addresses two growing concerns. The first is the uncertainty of care received by residents in our unlicensed personal care facilities, and the second concern addresses the lack of meaningful program standards and a comprehensive monitoring system in our licensed and unlicensed facilities.

I just want to first of all give a definition of what a personal care facility is. This is a private care home. It's a privately operated residence. It offers lodging, meals, and personal assistance for elderly persons and adults with special needs. Personal care homes offer services in a familylike setting for individuals who do not wish to live alone or need some assistance

with personal care, but they do not need or want skilled nursing or medical care. They're operated on a fee-for-service basis and should provide a safe environment, support, protection, supervision, and assistance in relation to individual needs of the residents in that home.

The situation facing Alberta dictates that it's time to come to terms with changing demographics and the shift to community-based services. Our seniors population continues to grow, and waiting lists have become a matter of course in the search for long-term care. Personal care facilities provide a welcome alternative for many individuals. Be they seniors or persons with disabilities requiring some degree of service, more and more people want a familylike setting where they can carry on with their own lives but still benefit from access to care and support.

The departments of Family and Social Services, Health, and the Seniors Advisory Council have expressed concern about the dramatic increase in the interest in establishing personal care facilities and the growing number of private care homes in the province. As well, concern has been expressed by many of the RHAs, the health units, and associations about the lack of provincial standards and inability to monitor standards. Concern has also been voiced by the public and consumers.

Currently the department of social services only licenses those facilities which house four or more adults. Those who want to avoid licensing requirements simply keep their client base under four. For those who do wish to house four or more adults, the licence involves only a relevant approval from Alberta Health and Alberta Labour as well as municipal zoning approvals. There are no other regulations regarding these facilities, and the licence does not imply an approval for program standards. While licensed applicants are given a copy of the Alberta Seniors Advisory Council's guide for private care operators, operators can only be encouraged to follow the guidelines.

Current monitoring procedures are inadequate. As it is now, facilities are inspected by the department once all approvals have been received and before a licence is issued. Day care program staff will investigate complaints, but they do not conduct regular monitoring. As for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee it only monitors those facilities which receive all or part of their operating funds directly or indirectly from the government of Alberta. That leaves a great deal of the facilities unmonitored and an even greater number of residents vulnerable to conduct of private care operators.

Other jurisdictions are addressing these concerns, and I'd like to briefly describe some of the licensing and regulations of operating personal care homes in Saskatchewan. I'm choosing Saskatchewan because their regulations have been used by other provinces to establish standards and regulations. The Personal Care Homes Act was passed in 1989 in order to regulate facilities that were not covered under other jurisdictions. To name only a few provisions: personal care homes must maintain comprehensive records; personal assessments must be carried out at admission; basic first aid and food service sanitation are required training for all personal care home staff; a care plan must be in place for each resident; the operator must ensure that each resident receives a complete medical examination at least once a year; recreational activities for social, emotional, spiritual, physical, and cognitive stimulation must be provided for each resident; caregivers must be at least 18 years old; and the operators must provide the care residents require either directly or by arranging specialized care from professionally trained health care providers. The list goes on. Saskatchewan is even in the process of developing other programs and standards to ensure the competency of operators and the well-being of residents.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the well-being of the residents at heart, and it has taken advantage of considering what has been done in other provinces to determine the best method of ensuring safety in our own personal care facilities. I'm sure that we've all heard about some of the situations that developed lately in Calgary. There have been allegations made regarding the misappropriation of funds, poor quality food, and physical and emotional abuse. Recently two seniors were removed from a home. These clients had not been bathed, open sores were not dressed, and they hadn't eaten for some time. Now the city is stepping in and introducing a bylaw to address the situation. While I commend the city for taking the initiative, if this pattern is followed by other municipal jurisdictions, we're going to end up with very inconsistent standards across the province. It's time that the provincial government stepped in to protect our citizens and establish provincewide regulations.

Mr. Speaker, the issue here is one of safety and protection. Other provincial and municipal jurisdictions recognize the need for regulation of all personal care facilities. Individuals in these types of facilities are there for a reason. Generally, they cannot live independently and they require some assistance. The very nature of the residents involved tells us these residents are vulnerable. They need the protection that only monitoring and standards can provide.

One of the main arguments I've heard against establishing more regulation in this area concerns the ambiguity that may arise if people want to care for their parents or their grandparents. In my opinion, this problem can be easily rectified. You could simply define personal care facility, as other jurisdictions have, to exclude homes with residents who are related by blood or marriage to an operator of the facility, or perhaps you can specify in the regulations whether or not care is being provided for the purpose of a business. In any case, this would not be an insurmountable concern. It does not mean that the province will be interfering in the lives of families.

I've talked to a number of different people, operators included, who are genuinely concerned about the lack of standards and safety in our homes. An individual in Calgary who is establishing an organization for these types of homes is deeply concerned about people who are applying to become private home care operators. Many have little to no experience in providing care and may not even have basic first aid skills.

4:20

While I am sure there are many personal care facilities that are operated by people like the woman I spoke to, who certainly is qualified – she has a social worker's background and her partner is a registered nurse – unfortunately we have no control over the quality of care that other residents are receiving. It's unfortunate that regulations are necessary, because I know that there are many excellent facilities out in the community. However, regulations in general must be put in place for the business or the individual who would take advantage of their position and who would shirk their responsibilities to their clients and the community at large.

As for monitoring these facilities, perhaps you could expand the mandate of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Perhaps the committee could respond to complaints as it does in the health care facilities review. The committee may need a few more people, but at least the infrastructure is already there in place to serve as a monitoring tool for the province. At the very least, a registry needs to be established so that we have a record of the numbers and the whereabouts of these facilities and who the

operators are. Currently there are many unlicensed and unknown facilities all over the province.

Mr. Speaker, personal care facilities are becoming more of an issue for a reason. More people are becoming interested in operating them, more people are interested in residing in them, and more and more complaints and concerns are being voiced about them. The situation cannot continue to be ignored.

I urge the members of this Assembly to support Motion 505. The citizens in all personal care facilities require our protection in the form of standards and regulations and a comprehensive monitoring system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this motion forward. About the most important thing I can say is: it's about time. There has been a shameful ignoring by the government over the years of several of the issues that the hon. member just spoke to. It is absolutely beyond my ability to comprehend why the government itself would not bring forward legislation to deal with this instead of relying on a private member's motion, because these are hugely important issues. [interjection] Contrary to what Cypress-Medicine Hat may believe, these are hugely important issues, and they deserve the full attention of all members of the Assembly.

Now, this motion calls for the establishment of regulations and the implementation of a comprehensive monitoring system to ensure the health and safety of all people in personal care facilities. Now, that's good, but it would sure be nice if we had a little more definition. I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow spoke to the kinds of facilities, but we'd like to have some more definition, and we'd like to see this motion go perhaps even further than its drafter intended.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Alberta Liberals are already on the record through question period and through previous activity in the Chamber asking for regulations and monitoring for privately run group homes. We know that the Health Facilities Review Committee does not provide sufficient recourse for investigation of cases of possible abuse. We know that the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act and the companion legislation that established the committee do not provide sufficient protection to people who are the possible targets of abuse. Alberta Liberals have called for a long time for the establishment of an independent health ombudsman, who would be responsible for investigating complaints of this nature. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, we'll see the committee that the Minister of Health proposed go into this realm.

DR. WEST: More bureaucracy. More money.

MR. SAPERS: The Minister of Transportation and Utilities is hollering about bureaucracy and more money, but of course, Mr. Speaker, Liberals know that it's the role of government to ensure standards, and that's where the government should be putting its money and not giving money to its friends. Now, I know that may be an antithesis to the member . . .

DR. WEST: Lower taxes.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Through the Chair, hon. member.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. minister may disagree, and I hope that he'll rise in the Assembly and speak against the motion if he disagrees.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of concern expressed as the government goes along its merry way restructuring health care and social services. We know that workers in social services have been muzzled, have been told not to speak up or they may lose their jobs. We know that health care workers feel exactly the same way. We would hope that this motion would not only provide protection to those people who may be the potential targets of abuse but also that the motion will be broad enough in its interpretation to help provide protection to health workers and others who would like to report cases of abuse but are somehow prohibited from doing so. We know that there are many cases of abuse and neglect that take place right now. Very few of them actually come to public attention because many of the workers involved feel that they have no choice but to comply with the employment conditions that are imposed on them.

Mr. Speaker, as we move towards more community-based care, I understand that some group homes, for example in the Edmonton area, are providing 24-hour care for clients who have been recently discharged from Alberta Hospital. I've been told that in some cases there may be as many as six clients, all of whom require medication. Care is given by workers who are on duty for 24-hour shifts. Some of these workers have very little formal education in the provision of medications, and sometimes these workers have to work as much as three or four days before they receive time off work, time away.

I'm concerned that nobody is monitoring the quality of care received in these kinds of situations. The individuals who are housed in these kinds of facilities deserve the attention of this government. Mr. Speaker, there needs to be standards of care, and we need to know how these standards of care are enforced. It's not the case that we can look to other areas in either the social services or the health care system for standards and enforcement. For example, we know that even with acute medical care in this province right now the standards have diminished to the point where parents are being told not to allow their children to be admitted into a hospital unaccompanied. In fact, I had a director of nursing in Medicine Hat tell me recently that her advice is that nobody should go into a hospital alone. Now, this isn't because the workers aren't doing a good job. They're doing the best they can under next to impossible circumstances. They're being stretched so thin that they can't even meet the standards of care that they would like for themselves. So we can't even look to acute care now for an example of how it needs to be done, because it's not being done.

I can think of an example of a very young child in Grande Prairie who fell out of a tree house, broke his arm in two places, was rushed to a hospital, and because of delays in surgical attention, instead of just a quick surgical intervention and then maybe two days of postoperative care, this young boy is forced to lie on his back in traction for three or four weeks, and this was simply because of the delay. That young child's mother has to accompany that child in the hospital, laying on a cot in the hospital ward, leaving her other three children to the care of neighbours and friends because she feels that she can't trust the system to look after her child. Mr. Speaker, if this is what's going on in our acute care hospitals, we can only imagine some

of the horrors that are taking place in these unmonitored, unregulated personal care facilities.

We hear from seniors who get no response from overworked staff. We hear from seniors, for example, who have fallen and find it impossible to get up. I had a report from a senior in a facility in this city, Mr. Speaker, who had just received a hip replacement, was back in a facility, fell, couldn't get up, didn't know whether or not her problem of falling was related to the surgery or not, couldn't get anybody to come to her attention, and it wasn't until another resident's family came to visit that somebody actually came to that senior's assistance. This is unacceptable, and it must not be allowed to continue.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded for today.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
 head: **Committee of the Whole**
 4:30

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 6
Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Under consideration for Committee of the Whole at this time we have before us amendment A1, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. With that in mind, we will continue debate. We'll now call on Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I rise to speak to this, I want to confirm whether I'll be closing debate if I initiate my comments on this. I believe I can rise as many times as required.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we're in committee stage and you're exactly correct.

MR. SEKULIC: Good. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I have risen once to speak briefly to amendment A1, and quite succinctly what this amendment does is it substitutes the clause that currently states "including any liabilities respecting pensions" and simply abbreviates that to "Crown." What we're doing through this amendment really is trying to reflect more accurately the true level of liability, or the true level of debt, that the province is currently in and needs to address.

Now, I just wanted to make a very quick point here before I pass the floor to one of my colleagues. We had so many debates, definitional debates – semantics has been one of the greater issues here – when we went into: are there new taxes in Alberta? We've been told, no, there aren't any new taxes. They're user fees, they're licences, they're premiums, but they're not new taxes. Well, the bottom line was: more money was coming out of the taxpayer's pocket and going into government coffers, and anytime that occurs, I would suggest that it is a form of taxation. If they put something into the private sector, a service, and then that private sector delivers that service and people pay a premium, well, that's different. That's the marketplace. Anytime that any money goes from a taxpayer to a tax collector, I would say that's taxes.

There's an analogy there in Crown debt. That's exactly what we're addressing, the misunderstanding of what Crown debt is. In the case of taxes, there was a taking of more and not referring to it as taxes. In the case of Crown debt here, we're counting less, and this is a problem because it misrepresents the true liability. So without including the pension liabilities, I think we're once again into this definitional. We can make debt be anything that we want it to be. I would dare say that we're counting significantly less and amortizing it over the same time period as what we in the opposition would propose, that we amortize the full \$16 billion debt. I think what this will put us in as a province is a better financial position 25 years from now with a much smaller liability at that point. I guess the best way of putting it would be that most of our revenues in the GRF, the general revenue fund, can go into core programs and services as opposed to paying interest on our debt. So basically what this amendment speaks to is: let's include the true figure of \$16 billion as our net debt figure, and let's start dealing with that debt right away.

With those comments I'll take my place and pass the floor to one of my colleagues.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that has been brought forward seeks to ensure that the debt that is addressed is sufficient so that 25 years down the road the gross debt that remains is not \$25 billion but is a significantly smaller amount, in the neighbourhood of \$7 billion. The amendment also seeks to ensure that Albertans are placed on a level playing field with regards to external bond holders. External in this case means anybody living outside the province of Alberta. What this does is ensure, then, that they are treated fairly with regards to pay-downs of debt that are out there.

I would argue that we have a greater obligation to pay off the unfunded pension liability in an expeditious fashion than we do in fact to retire some of the debt that is externally held, because this unfunded pension liability arose in part because the plans were not actuarially sound. They were not actuarially sound in part because of government, in part because of the management of the plans, but the government was the steward. They received the funds, they went into general revenues, and the government as steward had the obligation to ensure that they were actuarially sound. They are not.

There has been legislation brought into the House, Mr. Chairman, that has ensured that the various pension funds are now actuarially sound, and the costs of achieving this have been spread between the participants in the plan and the government. The intent of our amendment is to ensure that the government portion of the unfunded liability is paid down not over 40 to 60 years but is paid down over the same time period that we pay the external debt: over a 25-year period. It is the intent not to increase the share of the employees. As the hon. Minister of Energy had pointed out, that requires consequential amendments to other legislation. That is the intent of this particular set of amendments.

I would urge hon. members on both sides of the House to vote in favour of this for three reasons. First, when you're knocking on doors in the next election, you want to be able to look individuals in the eye and say, "We are paying down the debt, and to the extent that it is like a mortgage, we're going to pay down a significant portion of it and not leave two-thirds of it unpaid." After all, to use the mortgage analogy, you won't get title if you don't pay it off. That's how the market operates. So

there's that element of fairness and the ability to go before the electorate and say, "This is truly a debt retirement plan."

Second, it is fair in the sense that you're going to put Albertans at the front of the line and not at the back of the bus. I think all members on both sides of the House feel that to the extent that you can redistribute funds within the province, Albertans first.

The third point is that the costs of postponing paying off the unfunded liabilities for 40 to 60 years – anybody who knows anything about compound interest knows that the costs of deferring a debt obligation just means you're incurring more and more liabilities. Although we have not got an actuarial schedule for the various pension funds – you have to rely on the graph in the budget that shows it peaking at around 2011 – it's very clear that that's costly.

So on those three grounds, Mr. Chairman, I would think all reasonable people on both sides of the House would vote affirmatively for this motion.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today as well to speak in favour of this amendment, because it's been said that part of the solution to a problem is first of all acknowledging that we have a problem. We've come a long way acknowledging our liabilities in this province inasmuch as firstly acknowledging the unfunded pension liabilities, which for the longest time our government did not acknowledge. We have them today in our budget estimates. They're shown in the documentation as provided by the Provincial Treasurer.

Mr. Chairman, it's quite clear on the page of Budget '95 where it talks about net debt. The net debt according to the page in question identifies a net debt less unfunded pension liabilities. It goes on to say that we've got \$5 billion of this unfunded pension liability that we're going to take out and we're not going to call it net debt. It won't be part of our debt perhaps. Maybe it'll be dealt with somewhere else. You know, I'm having trouble understanding why we would do that, because in the same breath we show our liabilities and we show our assets on the page . . .

4:40

DR. WEST: The professors have to pay more money because Michael Percy has to pay more interest. So it's not so much unfunded.

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. Hon. minister, if you wish to enter into debate, please do so. We'll let Edmonton-Roper finish his comments, and then we'll ask for yours.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do enjoy, though, listening to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

But on the amendment, Mr. Chairman, we firstly have to identify that in fact we do have that liability, that it's tagged to the province. It is \$5 billion. It is there, it's real, and we have to pay it. The sooner we accept the fact that we've got to deal with it and deal with it in the context of this Bill 6, that says Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act – goodness, that's motherhood and apple pie. I can't imagine anybody saying that we couldn't support the concept of a balanced budget or the concept of debt retirement. When I looked overall at Bill 6 and looked at what the government is attempting to do here, what's happening is that we're taking the net debt being substantially less than what members on this side of this House and in particular myself, the

MLA for Edmonton-Roper – and I can tell you that on behalf of my constituents I'm very concerned, concerned so much that we are not acknowledging probably somewhere in the range of between \$6 billion to \$8 billion of net debt.

We talk about our liabilities being \$32 billion, and then we talk about our assets being in the range of \$18 billion, but imbedded in those assets we've got things like loans of \$2.3 billion to farmers and small businesses. Now, I'm not sure we're going to get all of that back. I'm not sure that we're going to get all of that back with loans to municipalities in terms of \$5 billion there or external heritage savings trust fund investments of \$6.9 billion. Who's to say that we're actually going to get that back? We're being extremely general here in saying that these are the assets and this is what our net debt is and this is how we're going to retire \$8 billion. We haven't said how we're going to retire other debt if in fact we don't get that money. Again, when I say that I don't think we're going to be able to recover certain assets, let's also take into consideration this debt. This debt of \$5 billion is there, it's real, we're going to have to deal with it, and it ought to be dealt with in the context of Bill 6.

I can tell you, Mr. Chairman, that when I rose in this Assembly and spoke to Bill 6 some time ago, I said that I would not support Bill 6, but with an amendment similar to this, it tightens it up and I think I could possibly come close to supporting it. I would encourage all members to support this amendment, and if it's something that I'm missing in all of this, perhaps somebody could stand up and tell me why it ought not to be included in Bill 6.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I wonder if we might briefly revert to Introduction of Guests. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

head: Introduction of Guests
(*reversion*)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce four individuals. They are Miles Smith, who is the secretary of the Edmonton firefighters association; Kim Smyth, who is vice-president of the St. Albert firefighters association as well as vice-president of the Canadian Association of Firefighters; Brenda Brooke, who is president of the Strathcona firefighters association; and last but not least is Rob Hartmann, who is president of the Edmonton firefighters association. If they could receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

Bill 6
Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act
(*continued*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury.

MR. BRASSARD: No. I was leaving.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry.

Are you ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have then before us for our consideration the amendment to Bill 6 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. All those in favour of this amendment, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. The committee is reminded that we have under consideration Bill 6, and in particular we are voting on the amendment to Bill 6, known as A1, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Ady	Haley	Mirosh
Amery	Havelock	Oberg
Brassard	Herard	Pham
Burgener	Hierath	Renner
Calahasen	Jacques	Rostad
Coutts	Jonson	Stelmach
Doerksen	Kowalski	Taylor, L.
Dunford	Laing	Thurber
Fischer	Lund	West
Forsyth	Magnus	Woloshyn
Friedel	Mar	Yankowsky
Gordon	McFarland	

Totals: For - 25 Against - 35

[Motion on amendment lost]

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to move a further amendment on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, and I think copies have been made available to the Chair already and initialed by Parliamentary Counsel. This amendment is to . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, you are going to give us a brief description of it and then wait till it's circulated, and the Chair would indicate that the necessary signatures are found to be attached to the document.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I was just going to describe the amendment. The amendment is to section 10 of Bill 6, and this amendment would strike out the words "the Audit Committee established under section 21 of the Auditor General Act" and substituting "the Auditor General" and (b) by adding "or the Standing Committee on Public Accounts" after "the Provincial Treasurer." So in effect what we're doing here is addressing, I think, what is an anachronism which appears in Bill 6. The anachronism is reference to the Audit Committee.

5:00

It's ironic, Mr. Chairman, that on the very same day that the government introduces Bill 19, a new Bill to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, we're still dealing with the old Audit Committee in Bill 6. The problem is that the Audit Committee is basically a semi-secret organization. It's an organization which is not open to the Members of this Legislative Assembly. It's still an organization discharging an enormously important public responsibility in secret. What this amendment intends to do is perfectly consistent with the government's ostensible commitment to openness and freedom of information.

I'm happy to see the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services here because I expect that he, as much as anyone in this Assembly and certainly as much as any opposition member, will appreciate the importance of moving away from the old-style, old-fashioned Audit Committee, that secret arm of government or quasi arm of government, and moving towards a spirit of openness consistent with freedom of information. The Auditor General has a kind of credibility, Mr. Minister, through the Chair, and even more so the Public Accounts Committee. I can think that either of those two vehicles would be vastly better to discharge the important monitoring function that's contemplated by section 10 of Bill 6.

Mr. Chairman, I think Albertans look for consistency from us, and I think that as the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services champions amendments to freedom of information, once again Albertans are going to be focused on those amendments and are going to be looking to see whether this is more secrecy and whether the cloak of secrecy is being pulled back over the work of government or whether it's being thrown off. In a similar way, they're going to look at Bill 6. I think this amendment is consistent with more openness. I think it does away with this anachronistic, secret, star-chamber vehicle or device that's known as the Audit Committee, and we're able to open things up. So I think this is a very positive amendment. I think it's consistent with the stated objectives of this government. I see the government Whip now giving instructions to members to respond in a positive way to this amendment, and I thank him for his assistance and support. I hope that all members in his caucus will be getting the same message that I'm getting from him.

Thanks very much.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This amendment is certainly consistent with an effort to make the government and the process of debt management and balancing the budget more transparent and accountable. Let me just give you some context

for this. I think it is fair to say that the province of Alberta presently has the most transparent set of books in Canada, possibly in North America, in terms of the way the material is provided, in terms of a consistent accounting on a consolidated basis and moving on a consistent basis to an accrual basis and also for allowing the amortization of capital. There are some very positive elements in the budgeting process.

MR. SAPERS: You'd never say that if Jim were here.

DR. PERCY: You're absolutely right.

What this Bill does, though, is take us many steps backward in terms of again looking at the process of debt management and financial management behind closed doors. The Audit Committee is not a committee that's a legislative committee. It's a committee, a secret committee, appointed by order in council. When I have read the Audit Committee reports, the members have generally been embarrassingly – embarrassingly – positive about what the government has done, with no effort to be arm's length and to provide constructive criticism. The hon. members who don't believe what I say should just look at what was tabled a week ago. Maudlin is the word that comes to mind. So I think that what you do need is an arm's-length mechanism for assessing financial management issues.

The debt retirement plan, then, sets out a very clear schedule of repayment: a minimum of a hundred million dollars, certain benchmarks that have to be hit over a five-year period. But there are a number of ways of doing it, and we don't think the Audit Committee would provide that thorough analysis of what is the least cost way of setting out and meeting the targets set out under the debt retirement plan. We think that other vehicles are more appropriate. The Auditor General is perhaps the best means of ensuring that we achieve the goals of debt retirement and financial management. That is what debt management is all about; it is prudent financial management in the least cost manner. To the extent, then, that the members of the Audit Committee are not necessarily arm's length – at least in reading the reports, they're certainly not prone to criticism of the government or to constructive criticism – we would think that the Auditor General would provide a more appropriate basis for assessing what has been achieved in this Act.

I would also point out that the second part of the amendment, which is "by adding `or the Standing Committee on Public Accounts' after `the Provincial Treasurer'," also provides, then, a vehicle for the Legislative Assembly to be actively involved in the very important process of debt management. After all, Mr. Chairman, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, a committee that all members of this House seek to be on actively, is a committee that provides a watchdog role, and it is one, then, that can provide an all-party perspective on efforts to achieve debt retirement. On occasion I've noticed, having sat on it, that votes tend to be a little bit along party lines on some issues, but I have noticed cross-voting on a variety of issues.

One would hope, then, that the possibility of cross-voting and free votes, when it comes to Public Accounts, is a very useful mechanism for trying to ensure that as we manage the debt, we do so in a way that imposes the least cost on Albertans in terms of reductions in programs, reductions in health care, reductions in education spending, and the like. On the one hand, for every dollar that we save in debt, we free up nine or 10 cents on a permanent basis for core programs, but if you cut using a slash-and-burn technique, the costs you impose are very great indeed.

What this amendment hopes, then, is to ensure that an all-party committee has a direct voice in the way that we attempt to deal with the debt and does so in a way that is consistent with what all Albertans want.

Again, Mr. Chairman, it's clear that when you look at the composition of the House, there are no members here of what used to be the Official Opposition in the last Legislature. They're not here. Eighty-four percent of Albertans voted for parties that were fiscally prudent, that viewed deficit elimination and concern about debt as being the appropriate focus of government. We think that in those terms, then, the best way of ensuring that occurs is by giving a more important role to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I would add that if hon. members read section 10, paragraph (b), it says:

may inquire into any matter relating to the financial affairs of the Crown in accordance with a request of the Provincial Treasurer.

Then we would add "or the Standing Committee on Public Accounts." What we would have then is Public Accounts working directly with the Auditor General, the way it's supposed to be. When you attend Public Accounts, the Auditor General is there. He's there as a resource person.

What our amendment attempts to do, then, is tighten those bonds and links and ensure that the Auditor General is actively involved in one of the most important fiscal issues facing the province, which is debt management and financial management.

So, again, I think this is a very constructive amendment. It in no way – what can I say? – attenuates or reduces the force of the Bill. All this amendment does is enhance accountability and openness and transparency. So I would think that all members, both sides of the House – I certainly would hope that the Whip on the other side would be as enthusiastic about this set of amendments as I am.

So, with those comments, I would sit.

5:10

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to support this amendment primarily because I think the way the Act was initially drafted, as it relates to section 10 – it says:

The Audit Committee established under section 21 of the Auditor General Act

(a) must report . . . to the Lieutenant Governor in Council . . . on the progress [of debt retirement].

If I understand this correctly – and I looked at the Auditor General Act – the Treasurer effectively picks his Audit Committee and says: come to me every year and tell me if I'm doing an okay job. Well, that's hardly arm's length. I mean, we've got to have someone who's arm's length from the process of retiring the debt, who is reporting to this Assembly; i.e., through the Lieutenant Governor. Therefore, this section can't remain as it is currently drafted.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, an audit committee typically isn't used in the fashion contemplated by this Act. The audit committee does not inquire into any matters. The audit committee is reported to generally by the auditor. The audit committee doesn't go out and look into matters as contemplated by section 10(b).

If I look at the Auditor General Act, Mr. Chairman, the way this thing is drafted, it just doesn't seem to make sense. It says in here:

The Auditor General shall give to the Audit Committee any information that he considers reasonable and appropriate to enable the Audit Committee to advise the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Well, on the basis of what exists in the Auditor General Act, the amendment put forth by my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud would be more technically and properly appropriate. In other words, we should have the Auditor General being the one that's reporting to the Lieutenant Governor because he is, firstly, independent, and secondly, he's the one who's qualified to carry out any of these investigations or inquiries into the financial affairs of the Crown in accordance with the request of the Provincial Treasurer.

I might add that it would be appropriate for the Public Accounts Committee to make inquiries of the Auditor General at the same time. After all, this Public Accounts Committee has got to have some ability to have some of its questions answered. The Auditor General appears in front of the Public Accounts Committee, and it would be appropriate that they be able to make requests of the Auditor General with regards to the debt retirement.

So, Mr. Chairman, I don't think the members opposite should view this as a threat to the integrity of their Bill. I think it is more an attempt to get the appropriate parties in line performing the appropriate jobs and to have a truly, independent body, i.e. the Auditor General, monitoring the debt repayment, a fact that all of us want to have happen.

So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I would conclude my comments and allow someone else the opportunity to speak.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In view of the hour I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 6. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the report, does the committee agree with the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Thank you.
The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we now adjourn until 8 o'clock and that when we do reconvene, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: A motion is on the floor to adjourn and to reconvene in Committee of Supply at 8 o'clock. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:18 p.m.]

