

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 22, 1995**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 95/03/22

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Let us pray.

We give thanks to God for the rich heritage of this province as found in our people.

We pray that native-born Albertans and those who have come from other places may continue to work together to preserve and enlarge the precious heritage called Alberta.

Amen.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have yet another petition to table today urging the government of Alberta "not to make sexual orientation a part of the Individual's Rights Protection Act."

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, Albertans from Grande Prairie and area wish me to present a petition on their behalf.

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek your leave to present a petition from 60 people from Medicine Hat and the surrounding area which states:

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

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a petition signed by Edmontonians far and wide.

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

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday of this week I presented a petition signed by Albertans in Stavely and Nanton and Claresholm concerned about hospital closures. I'd ask that that petition now be read and received, please.

CLERK:

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

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request that the petition I presented on March 14 be now read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta not to make sexual orientation a part of the Individual's Rights Protection Act.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling a response to Motion for a Return 166.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, I would like to file for information purposes copies of the Alberta Cancer Board's care and research magazine, *Facing Cancer*.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table four copies of two documents. The first document is an ad that I had placed in the *Edmonton Examiner* soliciting the opinions of constituents in Edmonton-Whitemud about Family Day. The second document is in fact a tally of the poll and the calls that I had. Of the 70 calls, 55 people supported Family Day; 15 wished it changed.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling today four copies of a Progressive Conservative caucus document dated March 8, 1995, indicating a less than enlightened approach to the Special Places 2000 program for this province. It's a secret caucus document. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. Hon. members, we are not getting off to the proper start today. [interjections] Order. Spring is already one day old.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that's what happens when there's a full moon.

I'd like to table four copies of a report that outlines the strength of opposition to Bill 203 within 19 constituencies.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you several very active members of the Edmonton-Avonmore constituency, residents of that area, who are members of the Bonnie Doon Mall Wanna Walks. These people believe in fitness. They're very spirited, and they've come here to enjoy a spirited and lively session in the

Legislature. They're seated in the galleries, and I would ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

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

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud and pleased to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 56 students, our greatest resource and asset for the province of Alberta, from Win Ferguson school in the city of Fort Saskatchewan. Accompanying them today are three teachers and 11 parents. The teachers are Mrs. Pat Sprague, who fortunately taught my children, also Mrs. Mary Lou Maskell and Mrs. Sandra Godue. Also, the 11 parents and great volunteers are: Mr. Brent Hoover, Mrs. Joyce Anderson, Mrs. Karen McGaughey, Mrs. Judy Side, Mrs. Mary Fedoruk, Mr. Ken Spicer, Mr. Stewart Winchester, Mrs. Rae Horiachka, Mrs. Janet Luyckfassel, Mrs. Susan Dzioba, and Mrs. Teresa Henderson. All but two are in the public gallery, and two parents are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House seven members of the Edmonton Chartered Accountant Wives Club. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Pat Sokolosky. Pat is a district representative for the Alberta Teachers' Association and a constituent of Calgary-McCall. I would like to ask Pat to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

1:40 Special Places 2000

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I have here a new Conservative caucus document which clearly outlines the government's plan for the Special Places 2000 program. As you might expect, it says that the special places program is very important, that in fact it's been endorsed by the oil industry, and that it's been endorsed by the forestry industry. Yet at the same time, when you look at the details of the document, it's very disturbing because it makes a mockery of the process, and it offends the true intent of the special places program. To the Minister of Environmental Protection: why is this minister destroying the Special Places 2000 program by adding, if you can believe this, economic development as one of the program's cornerstones?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what it is that the hon. member was waving around there. I don't know where he got it or what it says. Quite frankly, I think that it's extremely important that the hon. member recognize that we will be making an announcement very shortly on the Special Places

2000 program and would be only too happy at that time to answer questions relative to the program.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the minister could tell us: what will be special about the places that his department, this minister proposes to designate when the minister will actually allow oil and gas development, resort development, and who knows what other kind of development in the very heart of these protected lands?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just yesterday the ECA released a report that in fact talked about sustainable development and how that fits into the Alberta advantage. As far as the Special Places 2000 program is concerned, I will be only too happy to discuss that program once we have released the final document on the Special Places 2000 program.

MR. MITCHELL: It's right here. The caucus already has it, Mr. Speaker, and so do we.

How will this minister achieve the goal of protecting representative areas of all the natural habitat types in this province when Tory-appointed local committees will be able to veto any proposal they want?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, now I really don't know what document he's got. Any document that I saw never talked about a Tory-appointed board.

MacKenzie Place

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, due to the Premier's health care cuts Grande Prairie's MacKenzie Place is closing 25 percent of its long-term care beds in just eight days' time. The problem is that many of the residents who must leave simply have nowhere to go. This isn't an isolated case. It's happening in Red Deer. It's happening in Eckville. It's happening all across this province. To the Minister of Health: why is the minister allowing senior citizens in Grande Prairie's MacKenzie Place at this point in their lives to be evicted from their homes?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as usual the member is quite behind in his news. This area of concern about MacKenzie Place and the relocation of some of their members was dealt with some days past. In fact, I would say that probably it's been two weeks since I spoke to the chairman of the health authority there. In speaking to the chairman of the health authority, I was certainly given assurance that all of the families have been in a discussion about whether their particular family member might move. In concluding those discussions with the chair, the minister is totally satisfied that the appropriate discussions have been made, that all of the family members have had an opportunity to have input, to provide guidance, and to ensure that their family members are being cared for in the most appropriate way. I would suggest that if a family member does feel that that is not the case, the appropriate way to address that would be, first, to the chair of the Mistahia regional health authority and, secondly, further to that, directly to the Minister of Health. When it was raised with me, I did address it.

MR. MITCHELL: What advice, then, has the Minister of Health got for a 99-year-old senior who has been asked to leave

MacKenzie Place for two reasons: one, because at least she is one of the residents who can still walk and, two, because she can supposedly live with her elderly daughter, who also happens to be a senior and who happens to be at this time taking care of her husband, who's just had a heart attack?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I am not in this House going to get into correcting the hon. member, but again I would caution you to check your facts because you're wrong. You've got a couple of families mixed up. I'm not going to discuss individual families in this Assembly, but I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, and the Assembly that I addressed this some two weeks past, and those issues have been dealt with satisfactory to the individuals and their families.

MR. MITCHELL: I addressed the issue 45 minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, and it still hasn't been handled. If anybody's mixing up families, it's this minister.

How can the minister condone the eviction from MacKenzie Place of an 89-year-old diabetic woman who is in a wheelchair which will now force her to live with her elderly 89-year-old husband, who resides in a single room in a seniors' lodge?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I do not condone the eviction of anyone from any place. However, when a health authority deems it necessary to make other arrangements, what I do ensure is that the appropriate discussions are held with the families. That's what's important. There are reasons that at many times we have to change locations of residence for people. I would also mention to the hon. member once more that he is wrong in his facts, and if his 45 minutes ago was that close, I'm worried about his memory or attention to fact. I again say to the family that if they have continued concerns, there are two processes they should follow. One is to talk to the chair of the Mistahia regional health authority, and indeed if that is not satisfactory, I would ask them to call me directly, when I will discuss their concerns in the confidential manner in which they should be treated.

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

Freedom of Information Legislation

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's all-party panel on freedom of information had recommended that the records of this Legislative Assembly be open to Albertans. That recommendation was initially accepted by the government last spring, but now the government wants to limit access to those records, information about some 33 million dollars spent by the Legislative Assembly on things which include MLA perks, travel and housing expenses. My question to the minister responsible for freedom of information in Alberta is this: why is he now attempting to hide this information about MLA expenses?

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

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to add that those records that the member opposite is talking about are available through the public accounts, through our Conflicts of Interest Act, and through the Legislative Assembly Act. If they're not there, they can find them within the department. Those are accessible to the public at any time.

1:50

MR. DICKSON: Well, Albertans don't want to have to wait until a year after things happen to get information.

Mr. Speaker, since access delayed is access denied, why is the minister now proposing to allow the government to take twice as long to respond to requests for information?

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, the records are not delayed. It takes them a while before they compile them and put them into those Acts before they are released.

MR. DICKSON: Look at section 7, Mr. Minister.

My third question, then, would be this: why is the minister allowing those Tory MLAs who've been appointed to chair different boards and agencies for extra pay to keep secrets from the very Albertans who are paying the bills and paying for that double-dipping?

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, I think it should be brought out that our freedom of information is to bring government information to the public. Along with that, it is to protect the privacy of individuals. In the case of boards and agencies, the Act is to treat these people and their advice the same as advice from officials. We don't want to discourage anyone from giving this government advice.

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

Athabasca University

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a government we've been cutting costs in a number of ways. I believe it is necessary to explore all avenues of cost savings. My questions relate to Athabasca University and are to the minister of advanced education. Can the minister indicate what percentage of students actually complete their program and graduate with a degree?

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

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assume that the member is referring to what number graduate with a degree from Athabasca University. Let me be clear that there are no other institutions in this province or perhaps in this country like Athabasca University. It is very unique, and it provides numerous alternatives for students who attend traditional program delivery and campus-based universities. Each year there are between 11,000 and 12,000 students who take course work from Athabasca University while they're attending some other institution. To answer his question specifically, there are about 160 students who graduate with a degree from Athabasca University annually, but this does not reflect the thousands of students who use one or two or more courses to complete their degree while attending another traditional university in this province.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Since Athabasca University is largely an institution that is involved in distance delivery of postsecondary programs, would it not be possible to amalgamate this university's programs with other existing universities in Alberta?

MR. ADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm quite sure that given the valuable resources and the advanced technology we have in distance learning that are utilized by Athabasca University, there would be a long lineup of institutions who would be pleased to absorb Athabasca University with the 14 million dollars plus grant that flows to them each year. Athabasca University is a unique

institution with a unique mandate, and it serves thousands of students every year. In fact, the institution has taken a larger reduction than other institutions were required to take with our three-year business plan. Given the new mandate to focus on degree completion opportunities and brokering of degrees into other institutions in our province, they have a very important role to fulfill. I haven't seen any evidence that there would be a cost saving or that more students would be served through an amalgamation of this institution.

DR. L. TAYLOR: As the minister appears to be unwilling to amalgamate these programs, would he consider selling this asset to the private sector?

MR. ADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be clear that the government plays a valuable role in areas where the private sector either won't or can't participate. As the hon. member should know, our government's priority is investment in people. Certainly we're anxious that they enjoy prosperity. There are certain things that we believe in preserving in this province. By investing in our adult learning system, we're investing in the people of this province and in the future of this province.

I would add that, in my opinion, we get a very good return on our investment. We have not only some of the highest quality institutions in the country, but we have a very highly trained, skilled workforce in this province. Our publicly funded institutions are part of the Alberta advantage, and I believe that they have a part to play here, a very significant part.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Environmental Laws Enforcement

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water quality in our lakes and rivers and, more importantly, strict monitoring of industrial effluents in our rivers is something that we on this side of the House believe is important to enforce. In recent letters to the Department of Environmental Protection some of the pulp mills in Alberta are lobbying the government to allow them to reduce their monitoring requirements. I'm tabling four copies of one letter from one pulp mill operator making this request. My question is to the Minister of Environmental Protection. Firstly, is the minister prepared to let pulp mills reduce the monitoring of their effluents?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, we're not in any way interested in reducing the monitoring. We are entering into partnerships with industry where they will do the monitoring. We will set the standards, we will audit, and if in fact we find that there's not a proper job done, we will come down very hard on the industry wherever there's a violation.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I bet you he still believes in the Easter Bunny.

THE SPEAKER: Order, hon. Member for Redwater.
Supplemental question.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the northern river basins study is looking at the effects of pollution on our rivers and that the study is not yet complete, will the minister assure the House and Albertans that he

will not change any of the monitoring requirements or go to a self-monitoring plan until that study is complete and the report is reviewed?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wonder what it is that the hon. member's afraid of. I would think that if we changed and went into a partnership with industry while there's that really close monitoring going on and they're studying samples constantly, that would be an excellent time to test whether in fact the new partnership would work.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Mr. Speaker, thank you. To the same minister: if we do not have consistent monitoring of pollution, can the minister explain to Albertans how the department will know that environmental standards will continue to be met?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that today in the oil and gas industry 70 to 75 percent of the monitoring is done by the industry. Once again, the ERCB or Environmental Protection is out there making sure that the monitoring is done. We set the standards. We will come down hard on any polluters. The system has been working very well. As a matter of fact, in the northern rivers study it's very interesting that the indications are that the quality is improving. There has been much less effluent and damaging pollutants going into the rivers.

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

Lottery Review Committee

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I received a copy of a report prepared by Haines Elliott Marketing Services called the Alberta Public Opinion Poll Views on Gambling Final Report. To the minister responsible for lotteries and gaming: is this a report requested by him, or is this the final report of the Lottery Review Committee?

2:00

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. The report – and I have a copy of it also – was I think cleverly handled. It says: the final report of the Alberta public opinion poll. It was not commissioned by the government or any part thereof. It was not done by the review committee. It is not the final report of the review committee. It leads in certain directions. It's not even identified as to who it was done for, but it has left an innuendo or some impression out there that this is the Lottery Review Committee's final report. Many people out there probably are doing their surveys for their own vested interest. They have certain reasons for doing that in lines of gambling and otherwise. I just want once again to reiterate that this is not a report commissioned by this government, the review committee, or any part within the government.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary question is to the chair of the Lottery Review Committee. Can you tell me if there is still opportunity to provide information and input to the committee?

MRS. GORDON: I thank the hon. member very much for that question. The consultation process is still very much under way.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we're in Sherwood Park tonight at the Sherwood Park community hall, and on April 6 we'll be in Cochrane. As well, I've scheduled meetings with First Nations on April 3 and 12 to hear their views on native gambling. Because of the tremendous response from the public on this review of lotteries and in order to accommodate as many individuals and groups, we have extended the deadline for written submissions to April 15, 1995.

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Speaker, would the chair of the Lottery Review Committee be able to inform the House as to when the final report will be completed?

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, there's a great deal of information that we'll have to review, analyze, and examine before our final report can be written. To date we've had over 2,200 Albertans attend our meetings, heard 440 presentations, and received over 5,800 written submissions. Obviously, this process is one that Albertans want, deem necessary, and want to be involved in. Once our meetings are finalized, we will be reviewing all presentations, written submissions, focus group results. Our report will be finalized in the spring.

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

Brooks Wildlife Centre

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of agriculture stated that the Brooks hatchery plays a critical role in the development of tourism and agriculture in Alberta. He says that his government has made a commitment that under privatization, the Brooks hatchery will be an ongoing operation. In fact, the minister said that it's their intention to have long-term increased growth in this industry over and above the 35,000 pheasants that are presently released. My question is to the minister of agriculture. You said that you have a long-term commitment. Is this any longer than the five years that is required in your conditions for bids on the project?

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from Lethbridge-East. Indeed, this is an important part of our development policy as far as tourism is concerned and as far of course as agricultural development is concerned. We feel that through the process of privatizing this venture, which, by the way, is not making money at the present time – it's not breaking even at the present time – the entrepreneurial aspects of a new and positive direction can indeed allow this facility to be economically viable. It is our hope that through the process of tendering and acceptance of the various proposals that are coming forward, the best proposal will come forward for the long-term viability of this establishment.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of agriculture: has the minister completed any economic impact studies on the region to show what might happen if the pheasant hatchery is closed after the five-year period?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a three-year plan, and we're basically working from our three-year plan, as all our government departments are doing. At this stage we know that there are opportunities with the Brooks pheasant hatchery, and it's our feeling that by privatizing this particular endeavour, indeed the opportunities could even grow. We feel that through the privatization process the whole establishment can become far more entrepreneurial. We have some restrictions at the present time because it is government owned. By becoming privately owned, we can remove some of those restrictions and allow the whole facility to grow and meet the potential that it certainly can achieve.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of agriculture: will you confirm if the proposal which includes an immediate sublease of the facility to an American chicken hatching firm has made it to the final four that you're still considering?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a little unfortunate perhaps that again the research dollars expended by the opposition are not expended in a positive way. In the request for proposals, which I have here, one of the clear definitions is: "the purchaser must be a corporation registered in Alberta." I think that answers your question.

Just on that, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that as of 1 o'clock this afternoon there were four proposals on the table. There were four different proposals on the table. There have been no choices made from those four proposals. That has to be a clearly hypothetical question because I'm quite sure that all four proposals are not similar in nature.

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

School Councils

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our school communities are numerous, and their priorities in education are varied. The implementation of Roles and Responsibilities and the success of our school councils is essential to our educational reforms. My questions today are to the Minister of Education. Would the minister consider designating certain school districts as pilot projects in order to monitor the impacts of our legislation?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly this is a very important area, a very important initiative of the government relative to education. I think I'd like to first of all just make it very clear that we've had a very, very extensive consultation process in the review of the whole matter of roles and responsibilities, particularly as it applies to school councils. It is our full intention to move ahead with appropriate policies and regulations to put in place school councils under these revised directions in the next school year.

Now, with respect to pilot projects, certainly we have excellent examples of school councils operating right now which we can learn from. It is also certainly possible to set up a system where, working collaboratively with the department, school boards and Alberta Education would set up an evaluation policy which would apply to certain pilot or model school council situations.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to hear that issue "evaluation," Mr. Minister. My next question is with respect to evaluation. Will there be a particular process in place, and do we have a time frame for that for evaluation, particularly for those school boards that have recently amalgamated or those districts that have a large variety within their school community?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, another very significant initiative is the development of an accountability framework and performance measures for the entire education system ranging from Alberta Education itself to the school level and to those people working at the school level. In the context of that overall review, which is currently under way, and the policy and directions that will be emanating from that, certainly this would be a consideration.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. BURGNER: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is with respect to the financial resources that would be available to school councils in order to in-service the volunteers that are working in our school communities. How are those dollars to be distributed, and do we have a dollar amount that would be available to school communities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated on several occasions previously, we do plan, in parallel with the initiatives in the area of roles and responsibilities and particularly as it applies to school councils, to put in place an overall approach to in-service or to preparation for the roles that school councils will have. I do not have specific budget numbers to report at this time.

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

MLA Communication with Schools

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another recent initiative of the government includes government MLAs attacking Calgary school board trustees with faulty information created by the government's own rapid restructuring of the entire education system. It's gotten now to the point where one MLA in particular won't even return the phone calls of trustees to get the accurate information and is instead working around these elected trustees who are simply doing their jobs. My question to the Minister of Education: what have the school boards done to warrant this attack? What are they doing wrong?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of this question, and that is that an MLA has not returned phone calls and that sort of thing. I think this is something that is not really a relevant type of statement to question period.

The other thing is that I know of no attacks that have occurred in this regard. I think it is important to emphasize here in the Assembly that members of this Assembly have the right and responsibility to work on behalf of their constituents and the people of this province and to make representation in the appropriate manner, which, as far as I know, at this point in time has been done. In terms of communication within a particular area on matters of education, I think this is very important among all sectors of the education community.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question, then, is: why is it that government MLAs are trying to do end runs around the elected school board trustees of these two boards?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to just deal with two or three themes in response to this very nebulous type of question. First of all, certainly MLAs have an obligation, I would say, and a duty to talk to parents, to be open to communication in talking to the teachers in their constituency and in their area, to make representation on behalf of students, certainly to talk with their school boards, which I do believe the MLAs in Calgary certainly do: arrange meetings, communicate on all sorts of bases. Again, the premise on which these questions are based I do not think is fair at all.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, Mr. Speaker, my final question to the minister, then, is: since the government has already eliminated two-thirds of the trustees in the province, is the next step to eliminate the rest of the trustees in the province and add that role onto that of an MLA? Is that what you're going to do?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what seems to be the stance of the hon. member across the way, I think there has been good support across the province for the reduction in the number of school boards and the number of school trustees, and as I've emphasized in this Assembly, I think that has been done. It has been a goal also of the Alberta School Boards Association, and we have had great co-operation across this province from the vast majority of school boards that were involved in this particular process. As outlined, for instance, in the Roles and Responsibilities position paper, the school boards of this province still have a very key and very important role to play in the governance of education at the local level in this province, and that will continue to be the case.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

School Support Organizations

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are also to the Minister of Education. Section 17 of the School Act gives a framework through school councils for a new partnership of parents, teachers, principals, community members, and, in secondary schools, even students. For many years there have been parent/teacher associations, home and school associations, parent advisory committees, school associations. The various names of these school bodies reflect what the community wanted to call those associations. Will the minister under section 17 require these school support organizations to change their names?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's certainly good, as I was saying earlier, to see an MLA concerned about education and speaking out for the various issues that are placed before education in this province.

The issue that is raised in the question is certainly one that has come up at meetings held on the topic of school councils, and I recognize that section 17 does not stipulate any particular requirement. Certainly, we would want to make sure that school councils can preserve their names relative to the school that they represent, the history of the council, and so forth. There's no intention to interfere with place-names and community names and the specific school names.

The one thing that I think, Mr. Speaker, we do have to provide for in the policy and the regulations is a provision so there's not going to be confusion across the province with respect to those school councils that have a role commensurate with section 17 and the new policies and regulations. This may be something that can be limited to a particular acknowledgement of operating under section 17 in their legal correspondence and in their communication documents, their letters and letterhead and so forth. So we will be working on providing reasonable flexibility in that regard, at least for those school associations currently in place.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: under section 17 will a school be forced to disband its band parent associations, football support organizations, and the like because the Act speaks of only one school council?

MR. JONSON: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the Act is quite clear. After due consideration of the input to this point in time I would want to emphasize that we certainly anticipate and propose that there will be one school council for a school. However, the other organizations that are referred to here I think would be able to exist. We would not want more and more organizations to proliferate within the school context, but provided these other entities are working within the policy of the school board and of the school council, I think they should be able to continue that kind of role.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: will the minister require school support societies who are incorporated under the Societies Act to be disbanded?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there are really two answers I think that have to be given there. With respect to a school council which also wants to carry on as a society, we are looking to legal advice with respect to whether that can or cannot be accommodated. Certainly if there is an organization in the school whose purpose, for example, is fund-raising and they have established themselves under the Societies Act, I would think that could continue provided that society works within the policies of the school council and the school board.

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

2:20

Libraries

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Liberals value libraries because we know that libraries are an essential and a vital service and a vital source of knowledge and information for children and adults, especially in rural Alberta. Libraries are of enormous value to the community. They help educate Albertans, and they help develop reading, learning, and especially thinking skills, a trait that sometimes eludes this government. This government's misguided priorities may force some libraries to close. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development responsible for libraries. Given the tremendous importance of libraries, what is this minister doing to prevent them from being closed as a result of such poorly planned budget cuts?

MR. MAR: I would agree with the hon. member that libraries are very important and particularly in our rural communities. To

that extent we have not changed the amount of budget funding for libraries. It remains level at approximately \$12.29 million.

There are some initiatives that are being taken, Mr. Speaker, to network some of our libraries in a greater sense so that the resources which are available to a rural library would be greater by having access to library resources from other parts of the province as well. That is one of the things that is being looked at right now, a network of libraries so that perhaps someday there will be an Alberta library card that will access information from any library throughout the province of Alberta.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, several libraries are threatened at the moment with being closed.

Mr. Minister, how does closing libraries help prepare Albertans to compete in what is becoming more and more a knowledge-based economy?

MR. MAR: The responsibility for libraries rests also with municipalities. Right now, Mr. Speaker, the province is remaining level with its funding for libraries. As a result, if a decision is made at a local level that there cannot be sufficient support for a particular library, that is not a provincial responsibility.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: That's a bit of a dodge.

What will this minister do to prevent the closing of specific libraries in Wheatland county and elsewhere in rural Alberta communities? These rural libraries are largely staffed by volunteers, Mr. Speaker, and they're not that expensive to operate.

MR. MAR: Our commitment to rural libraries has remained the same, and it will continue to remain the same. Our level funding support for libraries will continue. But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that in some areas of rural Alberta there are from time to time difficulties because of the need for a critical mass in order to support a library. To that extent we hope that municipalities will recognize the need to perhaps engage in partnerships with other municipalities or perhaps with their school boards for continuing support for their libraries in their communities.

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

Obstetric Services

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is wrong to separate high-risk babies from their mothers. It's particularly wrong if this is being done not because of medical needs but because of government-imposed budget cuts. Closing down obstetrics at the University hospital in Edmonton is bad for mothers, it's bad for babies, and it may not even save money. To the Minister of Health: did the minister personally approve this plan to close obstetrics at the University hospital and separate mothers from their sick babies?

MRS. McCLELLAN: No, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health certainly did not. I don't propose to be an authority on the best utilization of obstetric services in this city, and I would caution the hon. member that perhaps he is not qualified to be that authority either.

Mr. Speaker, there is in this city a group of very knowledgeable people in this area, and the Capital health authority have been working with the experts in both institutions to ensure that not only do they provide the best services for the mothers and babies, particularly those mothers who have a high-risk pregnancy or high

risks that may develop after birth, but also to ensure that we maintain the research component of our obstetrics program, as well as for babies. So I really do believe that the people who are best positioned to make these decisions in consultation are the authorities who are operating the institutions and the experts, the professionals who are in there that really do know which is best.

I would remind the hon. member that whether it's desirable or not, in this province we may have to at times have a separation of a mother and a child. I think what is most important, as important as it is to keep them together, is that the appropriate care, the best care, quality care is available in this province, and that's what this minister and this government will strive to see happen.

MR. SAPERS: There was no consultation, Mr. Speaker.

Doesn't the Minister of Health think that this issue, this issue which affects thousands of northern Alberta families, is important enough to command her attention, so she can't just blame it on somebody else, and her immediate intervention?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, it is very doubtful that thousands of families will have a high-risk pregnancy. In fact, there are statistics on movement between the hospitals in this city now that show that that is quite minimal.

Mr. Speaker, I have to go back and say again that what's important to this government, to this minister, and to the people of this province, whether they reside in northern Alberta, in the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary, southern Alberta, or central Alberta, is that we have absolutely the best, the highest quality care for those high tertiary services. People in this province recognize that that cannot be available on multiple sites in this province. It simply cannot be done. We can't have the equipment or the expertise on that many sites. What is important is that we do have the best on a site that is available to all people.

Mr. Speaker, I reject that there has not been consultation. In fact, I would suggest that consultation is continuing on this issue.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of Health at the very least demand that a thorough analysis of this change be undertaken and then commit to table that analysis in the House? It's not forthcoming from the regional health authority.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, again, I believe I have urged and I know that the Premier has urged that members opposite get on with working with the health authorities. I would think that the hon. member has the capability and the capacity to talk with members of the regional health authority. I would be delighted to share with him the complete names and addresses of the board members. I think he might find one or two that he could contact that he could speak to on this issue.

I will continue to ensure that we have the highest quality care that we can possibly have in this province, but I do believe that we have to give the health authorities and the professionals who work with them in those authorities the ability to make those types of decisions that must be made in the best interests of our citizens.

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Transportation and Utilities wishes to augment?

DR. WEST: Yes. I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I had a granddaughter born at the Royal Alex obstetrical unit three weeks

ago, and the service that was given was absolutely remarkable, and all the roads were paved.

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

Perinatal Research

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The move of obstetrics and gynecology to the Royal Alex hospital will have a direct impact on the perinatal research centre at the University of Alberta by removing its direct access to patients and clinical materials. Researchers have no choice but to try to move their laboratories to the Royal Alex at significant cost, yet no specific provisions have been made. My question is to the Minister of Health. How can the minister justify the cost associated with moving the perinatal research centre, which will require the dismantling and the re-creating of the laboratories at the Royal Alex?

2:30

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, when I answered a question just a moment ago, I referred to the research component of this, which is so important. I can tell the hon. member, because I'm sure he's genuinely interested in the research component, that I have spoken with the dean of medicine at the University of Alberta. I have assurances that the Capital health authority are working with the dean, with other experts in that area to ensure that we maintain that very important research component.

This issue has been debated in medical circles and with the Capital health authority for some weeks. I can assure the hon. member that I have been in discussions with them about that component, and I believe that my hon. colleague the minister responsible for science and research has spoken with them also. What I do want to assure the hon. member and the House is that we value our medical research in this province. The decisions that will be made should be made on the basis of maintaining that research component and ability to continue to attract the quality scientists and research that we have here.

MR. CHADI: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that she's spoken with the Capital health authority, but I wonder: what specific instruction, if any, did you give the authority with respect to rearranging medical research, particularly this perinatal research that is happening at the U of A?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, again I do not profess to be an expert as to the best way to design a research facility. However, we do have that capability in this province. We have very capable people, and they are working together to ensure that they not only preserve the research capability that we have in that very important program, but indeed there may be opportunities to enhance it.

MR. CHADI: To the Minister of Health: what contingency plan do you have for researchers whose projects will be lost when they're told that the Capital health authority doesn't have the funds to move them?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I believe that's quite a hypothetical question. What I think I assured the hon. member in my previous answer is that we are most interested in maintaining that research component, and by having the dialogue between the research component, the dean of medicine, and the Capital health

authority, I am assured that we can not only maintain that research capability but in all likelihood enhance it.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just remind the hon. member that it is not the facility that qualifies excellence in research in medicine; it is the research itself. Gynecological and prenatal research is continuing to go on in all institutions in Alberta and at the University of Calgary as well. So the moving of this facility is not going to disrupt the actual research in that area. As a matter of fact, none of the scientists have come to me complaining that this is the wrong move. They're very positive about the amalgamation of research as well as having gynecology and prenatal in one facility.

As well, I think it's important to recognize that the medical research foundation has the excellent research component in all of Canada and is recognized not by the facility but by the actual research.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has expired.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

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

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

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

[Motion carried]

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

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

**Bill 203
Family Day Amendment Act, 1995**

THE CHAIRMAN: When we reported last day, the hon. Member for Medicine Hat was speaking, and because of the time we interrupted his comments. So we'd invite Medicine Hat to begin this afternoon's discussion.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yesterday when I was speaking on this Bill, I just really had nicely gotten started when the time expired, so for members who weren't here yesterday, I will recap just very briefly what I had to say.

Mr. Chairman, I was referring to the other side of this Bill. We have heard some very eloquent and I think some very good arguments on the economic side. A number of members that have spoken in favour of this Bill have talked about the economic side, and I don't deny that those are worthwhile concepts and something that we have to keep in mind. We've also heard from members who are speaking in opposition to this Bill at great length, about the fact that we are denying the public the right or the ability to have a statutory holiday and to have a day off. But we really haven't had a lot of discussion about the real purpose of Family

Day. That is the area that I would like to focus on and talk a little bit about: what Family Day is and why I believe that Family Day can serve as important if not a more important purpose by being celebrated on Sunday as opposed to Monday.

I talked yesterday very briefly about the fact that we already have two very important holidays that we recognize as a society that both fall on Sundays, those being Father's Day and Mother's Day. I talked a little bit about Father's Day yesterday, so I won't spend much time on Father's Day, but I do want to talk a little bit about Mother's Day. Mother's Day is something that's very near and dear to my heart, not only because I have a mother whom I love very dearly and certainly look forward to showing my appreciation to her each and every Mother's Day, but as all members are well aware, my background before I came to take my seat in this Chamber was involved in the retail flower business. I don't have to tell anyone who's been involved in a retail flower business that Mother's Day is probably one of the busiest occasions and the most recognized occasion of the entire year, and it's not restricted to the flower business, lest everyone think that I'm just out here to advertise my own industry. The restaurant industry: it's phenomenal the impact that Mother's Day has on that industry. If anyone has ever tried to get a restaurant reservation on Mother's Day, they can well imagine. The fact that Mother's Day falls on a Sunday certainly does not lower the impact of the very special occasion and the fact that we honour mothers on that very special day.

2:40

What this Bill will do, Mr. Chairman, is create that same kind of environment around Family Day, and I think it's very important and very critical that all members in this House realize that. We need to acknowledge the fact that families are very important in our society. The family structure is the very backbone of our society, and I think we as Albertans, as a Legislature should acknowledge the importance of families. I don't think we need to do so by having everyone take the day off work. Quite frankly, I think to some degree that denigrates the value of honouring the family. I think that if we designated a particular day – in this case the hon. member is suggesting that we designate the third Sunday in February – we can have another day as important in our lives as Father's Day and as Mother's Day, and it can be celebrated on a Sunday.

As someone who has worked in the retail service sector all my life, while I appreciate that Family Day hasn't been around for that many years, I can honestly say that my family never had the opportunity to celebrate Family Day because of the fact we are a very small business, a family-run business. When we had to pay double time to all of our employees to come and work on Family Day, and we were obligated to keep our stores open as a result of leases that we had with the malls that were involved in our operation, we had no choice but to work ourselves. So Family Day for us really became more of a working day than any other day. I don't think it's restricted to my family. I think there are a lot of small, family-run businesses where the Family Day statutory holiday created more of a hardship on their family than it created a benefit for them, not only for the individual entrepreneurs and proprietors of small business but in all service sectors.

The fact that we have recognized a Monday as a statutory holiday for Family Day, even for those people who are not owners of a business but who are employees of a business, if they're employed in the retail or the service sector, in many cases, in fact in most cases, that day really loses its significance because it's a working day for them. It's a day when they really

don't get an opportunity to enjoy their family. In fact, it poses a hardship on many families because the children are not in school, and in addition to the fact that they're working, they have to provide for some sort of day care or supervision for their children.

I think this could be a very significant event in the lives of Albertans if it's celebrated on a Sunday. We have all kinds of opportunities available to us as a society to celebrate this very special day on a Sunday designated as Family Day. Some suggestions – and I've heard these suggestions floated, and I think they're excellent suggestions. One is: let's have a look at some of the many cultural and heritage facilities that we have around this province and have some special activities. Here in the city of Edmonton they had a highly successful promotion on Family Day in the downtown core. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to participate, but I understand that there were many people that attended that, and I don't think the fact that it was held on Monday as opposed to Sunday would change the significance of that. We have people in this province who now do understand the importance of supporting families and of having a special day in support of families. That day does not need to be Monday, and I propose to this committee that if it were a Sunday, in many, many cases it could be supported, and the members who are participating in Family Day would get more out of it and would be able to participate to a much fuller extent on a Sunday than on a Monday, even though that Monday is a statutory holiday.

So all of the economic arguments aside, Mr. Chairman – and I'm not denying the economic arguments; I agree with the economic arguments – I think the most important thing that all members of this House should keep in mind is that Family Day is something that we as Albertans should support. Families are groups and institutions that are important to our society, so let's recognize them. Let's recognize them with one special day of the year, but let's make that day a Sunday, when everyone can participate and be involved.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you, and I urge all members to support this Bill.

THE CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on . . . [interjection]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Redwater, we have Edmonton-Manning speaking. He's on the same side as you.

MRS. HEWES: Not necessarily. Same side of the House but maybe not the same side of the issue.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your bringing the House to order.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I'll try. Hon. members, I wonder if we could let Edmonton-Manning speak without further interruption. Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for attempting and now this time actually being able to bring the House to order.

Mr. Chairman, I rise to speak on Bill 203, the Family Day Amendment Act, 1995. I rise to speak against this Bill. Although I listened quite intently to the debate put forward by my colleague from Medicine Hat, I listened to his argument, and to a large extent I agreed with his argument, but somehow I came to

a different conclusion. You know, Family Day, in my mind – well, in fact, family hour is every non working hour that we have, that we can use then to spend with our families. Family Day is every non working day that we can then take and spend with our families. I support that every third Monday in February be yet one additional day which we can spend with our families. I'm not going to debate that this is Family Day, in these quotation marks, and you must use it this way. I'm saying that this is yet another day which we can add to those many days in the year, those Saturdays, those Sundays that we currently choose to spend with our families. This is yet another day. It's a gift to all families in Alberta.

I believe very much in the marketplace, and I believe in marketplace forces, Mr. Chairman. Marketplace forces dictate – and they should to a large extent – things like price and quantity or demand and corresponding supply of goods and services. When it comes to families, not families as consumers, not as units of labour but as people bonded in non marketplace relationships, I think we have to have a greater deal of respect and delineate those, too, and respect families for what they are.

Mr. Chairman, I look at the comments from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I respect her advice to this Assembly when she spoke yesterday afternoon when she said:

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.

I appreciate that, and I think that's exactly how each one of us, the elected officials in Alberta, should be making our decisions.

2:50

Then I looked over, Mr. Chairman, to some comments made by the Member for Lethbridge-West, and I was a bit concerned. Although we agree on areas that affect business, definitely our paths split on this and we went in separate directions. I quote some comments that he made yesterday:

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.

Well, where I differ from my colleague from Lethbridge-West is that I am pro constituents, pro constituency, all those that elected me and those, for that matter, that didn't choose to put my name on the ballot as first. I'm here to represent them. By far I believe they would prefer that Family Day stay as it is, that every third Monday of February continue to be a day when they can add to spending time with their families. Despite the name which says that they should ideally spend the day with their families, I would encourage that this would add yet another day that we can spend with our families.

Then I read some more comments from my colleague from Lethbridge-West. Once again we slightly differ, because he goes on to say:

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.

I'd just add one more thing that I think he left out. Families, in fact, have been around a lot longer than politicians and businesses as well. So we have to do what we can to support and bolster the family, and certainly giving the family yet another day, an

additional day, to be together is, I would say, not an act of an arrogant government but an act of a responsible government.

In closing my comments in support of the status quo regarding Family Day, Mr. Chairman, I just want to refer to comments made yesterday by my colleague from West Yellowhead, where he said, "The government should do whatever is within its power to foster the family unit." I believe this is yet one more example of what government can do to bolster the family. With those comments, I take my place.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Three Hills . . .

MS HALEY: Airdrie.

THE CHAIRMAN: Three Hills-Airdrie. It's just that one other member was standing at the same time, and I didn't know . . . [interjection] Well, we're going back and forth. So Three Hills-Airdrie.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity today to rise and address the Family Day Bill. I want to take a moment to put on record why I voted against the Bill in second reading, why I'm going to vote against this Bill today in Committee of the Whole, and if it gets to third reading, why I'm going to vote against it there too.

Negative comments about Family Day seem to revolve around two main issues, the first being that it came into being originally for all the wrong reasons. It has been suggested by many that a particular member of a previous caucus had family difficulties and that was in essence the origination of the Family Day Bill. The second negative reason is that it costs too much for business in Alberta to have this day off. Well, Mr. Chairman, on the first point. We all have, from time to time, family problems, and maybe a day like this set aside in the middle of winter would help to alleviate some of them. I for one appreciate the value of Family Day. Communities throughout this province have responded by having Family Day suppers, Family Day festivals, mystery dinner theatres, skating parties, hockey games, pancake breakfasts, to name but a few of many of the events that take place throughout this province.

I don't care anymore why the day was initiated. I do care that people have a day in the middle of winter to do that which they choose to do. I chose to spend my day with my two sons. We went out for lunch, we went shopping, and we enjoyed spending the time together. It was just a really great day, and everywhere we went, people were out together. They were in the parks because it happened to be a beautiful day. They were in shopping malls. They were in restaurants. They were doing things together, and that surely is the essence of what it was that was trying to be accomplished when the day originated. I never met anybody that day that said: "Jeez, we should get rid of this day. What are you doing here? You should be back there voting to get rid of this day." They weren't saying that. People were saying: "This is really nice. This is great. Maybe I didn't really like it or understand it when it first came in years ago, but I like it now, and I want to keep it." I don't see anything bad about that.

With regard to the second point: the cost to business. I came from the private sector. I spent 21 years in private enterprise. I was also privileged enough to serve on a public board. I read in papers and heard here in the Assembly that business wants to get rid of that day. Interestingly enough, I have hundreds and hundreds of businesses in my riding, and not one of them – and

I repeat that: not one of them – has phoned and said, "You should be voting in favour of this Bill to get rid of Family Day." Not one, and I have unionized shops and non-unionized shops. I never received a call from a private businessman, and I never received a call from public business telling me that I should be voting in favour of this Bill.

Since the first vote, when I was publicly named in several newspapers for voting against this Bill, I have not received one call telling me to change my vote. I had one letter asking me to explain why I voted the way I did, not criticizing me one way or the other but simply asking me to explain. On the other hand, I have spoken with people in my riding. I've spoken with people in Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, when I was up for a basketball tournament, and over in Okotoks for a basketball tournament. I've yet to speak to anyone anywhere in those places telling me that I should be voting to get rid of this day. So where is this huge outcry from business? Well, I respectfully suggest that at least in my riding it's simply not an issue. People enjoy the day. Tourism flourishes, as do many of the retail outlets that my sons and I visited.

We have signed contracts with unions in Alberta, so even if this day is eliminated for non-union labour, we will continue to be in existing labour contracts where we will be continuing to pay people for not taking a day off. We could well find ourselves paying for that day that no longer exists.

We live in one of the harshest climates in the world, with little sunshine in the winter, and no break from January 1 until the middle of April is just too long. I ask my esteemed colleagues on both sides of the House to look at all of the information with a little bit of skepticism and vote to keep Family Day here in Alberta. It's a unique and wonderful day, and I think we need it.

Thank you.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. A few comments. I find myself in a curious position on this one, as obviously other members do as well, because when it was first suggested by the Premier and brought in as a flagship Bill, I voted against it. I can tell you the reasons. As a matter of fact, I reread the *Hansard*, and I was astonished at my eloquence and my reasoning that among other things in fact it didn't guarantee a day for families. It's a great name and I appreciated that. I also appreciated the sincerity with which it was put forward, but it didn't guarantee that all families could share that day. In fact, it means that many families have to work on that day, and it provides some real difficulties and divisions. So I didn't support it, and the Premier of the day was disconcerted and made it very clear to me that he was disappointed in the way I spoke against it and voted against it.

Curiously, exactly the same division appears today. The same people who were against it and for it then are against it and for it now. I do not believe that our positions have changed very dramatically. I appreciate the member bringing it forward. I think that at the time perhaps we didn't have the kind of understanding about the Bill that we really needed. It may have been done perhaps a bit more hastily than it should have. It seems to me this is the kind of Bill, Mr. Chairman, that probably would serve well on a referendum or a plebiscite. Ask people what they think about it. Do they really want it? I felt at the time that it was a misnomer, that it shouldn't have been called Family Day, because it wasn't that. Since then there's been really not a great

deal of new evidence of the benefits or of the handicaps or problems that it's caused. We don't have a great deal more.

3:00

Mr. Chairman, I saw it solely as a winter holiday, and as such, other members have spoken to the merit of that. I think it is a nice break in the middle of a month that is full of depression. Often the suicide rate skyrockets in February. We need a bit of a break. We need some lightening in our lives, and I saw it as that. But it was never available to all families, particularly those who are self-employed or in small business. Municipalities said that there will be extra costs that we are going to have to pick up. It produced a conflict with federal civil servants, who had to make a choice. Collective agreements and arrangements for staffing had to be changed. But it did happen, and it happened a number of years ago. So at this point in time it makes it pretty difficult, because those collective agreements have been changed to accommodate this statutory holiday in Alberta. Employers have taken this into consideration in their costs and in their P and L statements. The mistake, if it was a mistake – and I thought at the time that it was a mistake – shouldn't be compounded at this point in time, in my view. We have also seen the proliferation of some excellent volunteer programs in our communities that people enjoy and participate in.

Mr. Chairman, in this province we've got something called a family grid. Although I realize that the Premier's council on the family is now going to be a thing of the past, we do have a family grid that was developed by that council, and presumably, everything that has to do with families should be tested against that filter. Now, I had to ask myself: "Okay, suppose this motion is passed." And I appreciate the member bringing it forward because I think it's a dialogue we need to have. "Will the funds that are saved by this government," and I think the member has indicated that there'll be some savings that would accrue to the government, "be dedicated to those issues that the council on the family says need to be addressed?" In other words, if we save money by not having Family Day, can I assume that the funds saved would go into protecting family life, as the grid says? I think the answer is no. I don't think they'd go there at all.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

You know, there are a number of things that we all know would strengthen families and family life: poverty of children, pay equity for women, maintenance enforcement regulations, employment standards changes, violence in families, spouse abuse, child abuse, isolation of families, seniors, flextime, home offices, child care, Head Start, addictions in families that cause great distress. I don't see any promise whatsoever that the funds that would be saved would do anything to assist those programs. Again, Mr. Chairman, this reinforces my original comment that I don't believe that Family Day – I think it's a winter holiday, and I wish we'd called it that – is the right name for this day. I think that's where the mistake was made.

Mr. Chairman, no question that this year people enjoyed it immensely, at least in this city. The weather was good. People were out in great numbers, and they were out in families. There have been many wonderful volunteer activities put together, and there have been many activities put together by businesses. Business, retail, enjoys this. They find that it's good for business. Tourism finds it's good for their business. Community activities have been proliferating all across the province. The adjustments have been made by business. The adjustments have been made by

government in collective agreements. I believe there are benefits that we haven't yet really measured from this winter holiday. On the other hand, I don't see any hard evidence coming forward that the holiday has been any real problem or handicap.

Now, I've heard from a number of businesses in my constituency that think it should be held only on a Sunday. But I ask you about, say, Thanksgiving Day, which is another one. We celebrate that on Sunday, but we have Monday to spend with our families. I think this is the same kind of thing.

MRS. SOETAERT: Do the dishes.

MRS. HEWES: Yeah, do the dishes. I think what will happen here is that Family Day will be celebrated on Sunday and Monday. It will be comparable to Thanksgiving, and I think that's the way it should be considered.

Mr. Chairman, finally, I'd like to have seen a question go to the people on this. It should have happened at the time it was first proposed. I see no reason why it couldn't happen now and let the people of the province decide if they want to scrap this particular day. In the meantime, having said that I didn't support it in the beginning, I do support the continuation of Family Day as it now exists. Therefore, I will not vote for the Bill.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise in support of this Bill. I have a number of reasons, some of which have been spoken to already. I was doing a little bit of calculation, and one of the concerns I have with respect to the holiday and to the way the holiday is placed and to our attitude toward the holiday is with respect to our students who are in school. I don't believe that just focusing on the discussion of Family Day is an answer to this issue, but I have not yet heard the argument with respect to the impact on education as we have to the need for holidays. Noted: it's just a winter break, and we need to have continued holidays.

I did some calculations with respect to school districts that I'm involved with, and I would just like to bring to the House's attention that notwithstanding our Christmas break, which for schoolchildren started approximately the 17th of December and ran this year through to about January 3, which was an 18-day break in school – and I don't know if my colleagues are aware of the fact – then our high school students write their departmental exams in the latter part of January, and there is about a two-week break in the school system to accommodate the grade 12 students writing departmentals. Of course, because we have students in grades 10 and 11, their high school program and their semester system focuses exams on that time. There is an approximate 17-day break again in their studies. When you add to that the combination of teachers' convention and Family Day, which is a five-day break, and then what is recognized in Calgary, another professional day in February, it totaled up that approximately 41 out of 73 days were away from school. While my whole focus is not to single out Family Day, I do think it's important that we as legislators look at the impact of these breaks on the education system. We happen to have an education system that deals with a semester system, and our students in high school are gearing down at the end of January and gearing up again in February. To have this extensive time off school I find really, really disconcerting.

In addition to that issue with respect to Family Day, I have a concern with the way the debate is focused in that the issue is that we need a holiday. While I value the fact that there is a long term between Christmas and Easter, in fact for our school system a number of districts have a mandatory March or spring break that occurs within the second to third week of March. Not all school districts follow taking their break over the Easter holiday. So with respect to that need for a break, there are certainly a number of days that are available in the mid-March area. In fact, I received some information from one of the travel agents outlining certain holidays that occurred over the winter months, and they were very clear to identify that for three or four days before the holiday or after, depending on when it occurred, significant bookings were made for families or groups to take that time away from school and from work. In addition, they have a number of field trips that the school communities lock into, and they use either their Christmas break, the mid-semester break in March, Easter, or the Family Day/teacher convention arrangement depending on the event. I have a real concern, Mr. Chairman, that we continue to log holidays. We aren't necessarily providing our students with the consistency of learning that they might need at this time.

3:10

I also have a concern – and a number of these issues have already been spoken to – with respect to the economics. We received calls in our constituency. There weren't a lot of them. It was not the number one issue of the day. They were split almost 50-50, but there was a sense of unfairness: some communities and some groups could access the holiday because it was legislated, and some could not. Those who did not have access to the holiday still had to arrange day care and support for their families and it became quite onerous, or in fact some people had to take the day off to be with their children and lose pay because they don't have a continual employment contract that would allow them that particular day off. I think part of the problem with Family Day as it exists is that there's not a consistency. Therefore, the very intent of it has been lost because of the fact that we cannot universally apply it across the province.

One of the most appropriate things that's occurred because of this discussion is the fact that – whether it's your local community, the legislators themselves, whoever chose to become involved – the issue of who their families are and how they would spend time with them has taken on a bit of priority. I certainly know that around my dinner table we are a house divided on Family Day. My husband does not support eliminating it, while I do. So, as you can appreciate, when you've got two views like that within one family, you can imagine what Family Day discussions could be like. I haven't won that one yet; the day is not over.

MR. FRIEDEL: But you vote here and he doesn't.

MRS. BURGNER: That's right. I vote here and he doesn't. That's true.

I continue to say this, Mr. Chairman, because I feel that when we take the politics out of some of our debates, there are a number of very fundamental issues that come forward. One of them is that we have to have discussion about why public policy is the way it is, and that's why I felt the need to talk about the issue with respect to continuing in education, just as we've talked about the economics, just as we've talked about the value of our families. I don't feel that we will ever restore confidence in the elected officials from the public if they don't know that we do actually take time to deliberate and review and discuss these kinds of issues. So I really commend the hon. member for bringing

forward this debate. I have no problem with the fact that there are a number of positions on either side of the issue.

I have also received some calls with respect to the recreational communities that do access this day. I really do appreciate the employment opportunity and the economic benefit that come to the various winter resorts. It is part of our Alberta advantage. But I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that when I look at the number of ski days that are available to our children through their own school programs, as well as talking to my own friends who take the additional day, whether it's mandated through legislation or not, we have well-established resorts in our community, and the dependency on government to provide them with a holiday is not going to make or break their economic viability. They do stand on their own merit, and they're well received in that regard.

Mr. Chairman, that is the conclusion of my comments. I think, Philosophically, that the most important issue is the fact that we recognize that we have a responsibility as parents and as children to reflect on our commitment to our families. I don't think that's tied to a particular day, and I do believe the opportunity to have that discussion intergenerationally has been very valuable. I do feel very uncomfortable with the inability to have this holiday uniformly identified across the province because of various contractual obligations. Therefore, I would like to see it moved to one Sunday when we can all celebrate together.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to enter the debate on Family Day and make a few comments. I don't want to talk a whole long time, but I thought I'd share with members, for what it's worth, how I spent my Family Day. It was in the constituency of Banff-Cochrane. I took the opportunity to spend the day with my wife and daughter and son. As you may recall, this year for Family Day the weather was quite pleasant, quite nice. The reason I'm making the point is that we've heard those who support the Bill suggest that one of the reasons for getting rid of Family Day is the cost to business. Well, I took the day to visit a well-known business in the town of Cochrane, MacKay's ice cream, run by two women who in fact have received awards as women entrepreneurs. I took a drive by the western heritage centre as well; didn't see much happening there.

MR. EVANS: Next year.

MR. BRUSEKER: Maybe next year. All right, hon. minister. The interesting thing was that on this particular day – and fortunately it was a pleasant day – the lineup was out the door. Business was booming. Now, I didn't go there the Monday before Family Day, and I didn't go there the Monday after Family Day. Maybe the minister who represents Banff-Cochrane has been there on another Monday, but I would suspect that business . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Wouldn't be out the door.

MR. BRUSEKER: Wouldn't be out the door. I agree. Probably would not be out the door. So on this particular day, Mr. Chairman, maybe they did have some increased costs in terms of additional hourly rates for the staff that they have, but I would suggest that they more than – more than – recouped that cost on that particular day. I've also heard from some of the ski operators in the Banff-Cochrane constituency as well who say that that particular weekend for them is the best weekend of the year,

better than Christmas, in terms of returns. So certainly that particular group of business operators are fully supportive of retaining Family Day.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek did indeed say that we should listen to our constituents, so I have talked to my constituents, as many as I could, admittedly not all of them, which of course is always a problem. By far and away the majority of my constituents in Calgary-North West like Family Day. They would like to keep it. We have had a good number of members refer to the calls from their constituents, and I think it is certainly an issue that is near and dear to many people's hearts and is an issue that quite honestly, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps kind of unique. It doesn't really reflect right versus left or whatever.

Mr. Chairman, I don't want this to go to the Member for Banff-Cochrane's head, but as I listened to him - I listened attentively when he spoke to this Bill at second reading - I found myself agreeing with him, and I even thought he had a good idea. He talked about the concept: why don't we let the people decide? And I think someone else suggested that earlier on. This is an issue, right or wrong, that was introduced five years ago. The people of Alberta are now getting used to it. It's something that has come in place. We in the province here do have some control over this. We could decide to keep it, change it, shift it, amend it, abolish it, or whatever, but why not let the people of the province of Alberta make that decision? In the city of Calgary we've had referenda on things like water meters: should we have them or shouldn't we have them? We've had referenda on things like fluoridation: should we add fluoridation to the water or shouldn't we? I'm still not sure which side of the story is right on that one, but we've had fluoridated water now in Calgary, as Edmonton has, for better than 20 years, I expect.

Given that, Mr. Chairman, I thought that perhaps what I would do is offer to the hon. member who introduced this what I hope she considers to be a friendly amendment. I'm not sure if she will or not, but I thought this is such an easy thing to do: let the people decide whether or not they wish to keep this through a referendum. I thought I would put forward a proposed amendment and see if the House would like to discuss an amendment to have a referendum on whether or not we keep Family Day.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I think it might be a good idea. I'll pass it to the page, and you can have a look at it.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, hon. member, I haven't seen the amendment, but I understand that Parliamentary Counsel has not approved this amendment.

AN HON. MEMBER: Can't hear you.

3:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Oh, sorry. Hon. member, it's my understanding that Parliamentary Counsel has not approved this amendment because it changes the intent of the Bill. So I'd better take a look; we'd better see. Has Parliamentary Counsel seen this amendment?

MR. BRUSEKER: No. [interjections] If the member wants to accept it, she can accept it.

Chairman's Ruling Admissibility of Amendment

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, after reading this, my earlier remarks are in order. This does in my estimation

change the intent of the Bill, because it does clearly state that a referendum be held. So I would put this out of order.

Hon. member.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Over the last couple of weeks I've done some extensive consultation in my constituency with regard to this Bill. Of the adults that I've talked to about it, the split is right down the middle: about 50 percent of them support keeping the day as a statutory holiday and about 50 percent of them support changing it and having it as a day like Mother's Day or Father's Day. However, in listening to the discussion and the debate on this issue, the strongest positions and arguments have come from those who want to keep it as a statutory holiday. So I take that into consideration when I decide how to ultimately vote here.

I've also talked to a number of students with regard to this, and without question, in whatever school I've gone to, 80 percent of the students support keeping it as a statutory holiday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Of course.

MS CARLSON: Ten percent of them think it should be eliminated, and 10 percent of the students have no opinion. While some members are saying of course they want the day off, the fact is that many of these students are now voting members of my constituency, and I think they have as much right to voice their opinion and to be considered when it comes to how I'm going to represent their views.

So for those reasons I will be supporting keeping Family Day as a statutory holiday in this province.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to speak against Bill 203. The family is a very important unit in our society. Unfortunately, we are seeing a decline in family values across North America today. The number of broken families and the number of divorces have increased steadily. There are many things in life that you cannot buy with money, and family is one of them.

I have listened to the debate, and there are two reasons that some of my colleagues have used to convince us to drop Family Day. Number one is that we cannot afford this day, and number two is that it does not do anything good for the family. I cannot agree with both of those reasons, because number one, if we start to put a dollar value on Family Day, then maybe we should do the same for all the other holidays, and maybe then we should work 365 days a year and drop all the holidays altogether. I do not believe that is the thing we should do. The second reason that some people support the Bill is that it does not do anything good for the family.

I keep thinking of the chicken soup argument. This day may not do anything good for the family, but it may not do anything bad for the family either. It is just like chicken soup. You give somebody the soup, and there's a good chance that he may feel better, and if it doesn't do the trick, then you have nothing to lose. A good holiday in February is something that we all love and enjoy, and I think many working Albertans also enjoy it.

We talk a lot about reinvesting in Alberta. We talk a lot about looking out for the people who are underprivileged, looking out

for the people who cannot speak and cannot fend for themselves. I think this is one of the very few things that many of the working poor people in Alberta actually enjoy. For that reason alone, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to vote against this Bill.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, rise to speak against Bill 203. When I assessed and invited comments from my constituents, as late as today it was still 50-50. It certainly was not an issue that came to the elected representative; it was an issue that I had to go and invite comment on. In fact, since the last vote I had one phone call, and indeed it was from a businessperson communicating to me that they would prefer to see Family Day being moved from the Monday to a Sunday. Since that phone call I've had two letters. One was from that individual who phoned me, and the other was a new person, both businesspeople asking for Family Day to be moved to a Sunday.

Overwhelmingly, when I've spoken with family members, the business community, retired people, students, it's come out 50-50. So the bottom line is that it's a decision that the elected official has to make and do it for the right reasons. I certainly would not have supported it if indeed the amendment had been found to be acceptable, because quite frankly I think that when you go out inviting comments from your constituents and you get it back 50-50 or you get it back 80-20, it's a cop-out to use the referendum route. So I certainly didn't think this was something that warranted a referendum.

When you look at the importance of family, it's been my firm belief that the family has been undermined in every way over the past decade. It saddens me to stand in this Assembly and look at what has happened to the traditional Sunday, how it's become commercialized. If there's anything that Bill 203 has brought to my attention it is that when people talk about Family Day and recognition of Family Day, the one thing that disturbs them most is the continuation of the commercialization of holidays. When they said to me, "We support it being moved to Sunday," they always qualified it. They said, "Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, leave it at Monday if indeed a Sunday move means that businesses are still open." They want to see Family Day on a Monday with the businesses closed, the commercialization removed, and I fully support that. I think we as legislators have to try and communicate to society that there's more than the almighty buck. There's more than the dollar that drives your quality of life.

Yes, we've got to be fiscally responsible and balance the budget. Yes, we've got to recognize that the regulations that are in place are conducive to the entrepreneurial spirit within the province of Alberta, but you must always be cautious that you don't allow that to dominate. There has to be a balance, recognizing that family time has to be meaningful and it has to have quality. Through the industrialized society and now the society we live in, a telecommunications society, more and more we're seeing an undermining of that family, the quality of family time.

3:30

I would say that if I had been in the Assembly when the former Premier, Don Getty, brought this family holiday forward, I possibly would have supported it at that time. It's been stated from both sides of the House today that all families have difficulties, and recognizing why former Premier Getty possibly introduced it, I think he introduced it for the right reasons. He within

his own family recognized that we as elected officials, we as businesspeople and professionals often don't give that quality time to our own individual families. Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, as a Member of this Legislative Assembly I've become more selfish than when I was in municipal politics in ensuring that I don't only give what I hope is quality time to my own children but also to my nine grandchildren. Spend Family Day with your family. I think that's so important. So while there was some question about the introduction of this Family Day originally, I think it was well intended at that time. I still think the intention is correct in 1995.

I think we as legislators have somehow got to wrestle with the question of the seven-day business commercialization of the society we live in, and hopefully we'll start to see some recognition. It doesn't need to be a Sunday, but there has to be recognition where we shut things down and we focus on the family and we focus on the generations of the family.

I'm going to go back to Scotland for a week, Mr. Chairman, to see my elderly mother. My elderly mother's life is coming to an end. I've made a choice, and I think one has to make those choices. Do you put your professional career, your elected career before your family? There are certain times you must not do that. You must always put your family and friends first.

So with those comments I certainly will be voting against Bill 203, acknowledging that in the Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan constituency it's 50-50 support either way. I've made my decision. I respect the family, and I want to see Family Day remain.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the Bill itself does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, if any?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:34 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Mirosh
Brassard	Gordon	Paszkowski
Burgener	Havelock	Renner
Chadi	Herard	Rostad
Coutts	Hierath	Severtson
Day	Hlady	Stelmach
Dunford	Langevin	Taylor, L.
Fischer	Lund	Thurber
Forsyth	McClellan	Trynchy
Friedel	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Abdurahman	Haley	Pham
Amery	Hanson	Sapers
Beniuk	Henry	Sekulic

Bruseker	Hewes	Soetaert
Calahasen	Jonson	Taylor, N.
Cardinal	Kirkland	Van Binsbergen
Carlson	Laing	Vasseur
Clegg	Leibovici	White
Collingwood	Magnus	Wickman
Dalla-Longa	Massey	Woloshyn
Decore	Mitchell	Yankowsky
Dickson	Nicol	Zariwny
Doerksen	Percy	Zwozdesky
Evans		
Totals:	For – 29	Against – 40

[Motion lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members are reminded that the tradition of the House still is desk thumping.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move that Bill 203 be reported as defeated.

[Motion carried]

MR. EVANS: I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain Bill. The committee reports the following: Bill 203 defeated in committee.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report? Those who concur, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: So ordered.

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

3:50 **Bill 204**
Liquor Control Amendment Act, 1995

[Debate adjourned March 14: Mr. Hierath speaking]

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

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of closing remarks. The members of this Assembly can vote in favour of this Bill and remove the temptation of alcohol by removing the ease of access until such time as young people are more mature, to the point where they can better make decisions about responsible alcohol use. We can do this for our kids.

I hope that all members of this Assembly, regardless of their partisan affiliation, can see fit to pass this Bill into law and make 19 the legal drinking age in Alberta, not as a punishment to young people but for the benefit of young people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 204, the Liquor Control Amendment Act, would, if passed, move the legal age at which a person can buy liquor or enter any licensed premises to 19. Now, passage of this Bill I think would create a very strange situation, because an 18 year old would be deemed to be an adult under the law and able to enter into contracts, able to work, vote, drive, make war, make love, have kids, enter into marriage. All that would be possible. In fact, that person would be able to do anything and everything that a 30 year old can do except go into licensed premises and buy booze. Now, I think that creates a very strange situation.

Now, it's amazing that we wax so eloquently and profoundly about the importance of child rearing and the importance of marriage and the importance of voting – voting particularly, considering the vote very clearly and unequivocally – driving carefully, and all that, yet when it comes to buying liquor or entering licensed premises, we say you have to be one year older, as if that one year is going to give us that supposedly needed added maturity. It really doesn't make much sense. I have difficulty with this whole concept because it appears as if the drinking or buying, I suppose, of booze requires more maturity than all the other things: child rearing, having kids, going to war, and the whole bit.

Now, the Member for Little Bow has given us a great deal of statistics in order to try to bolster his argument, but I think we all know that statistics can be manipulated freely. One only has to look at the budget to see a certain amount of manipulation demonstrated. But what he did not share with us is that even a government agency itself, AADAC, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, is doubtful about the effectiveness of raising the liquor age to 19.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Never trust a bureaucrat.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Rather, they say, Mr. Speaker – and this is perhaps something that Cypress-Medicine Hat may want to listen to – that education is the key, and education particularly in reference to not just drinking but drinking and driving is far more effective.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've had some personal experience here which has perhaps been a little different from most of the members in the sense that I grew up in a culture where liquor was accessible. One could purchase it freely. One could enter licensed premises at age 16. I must admit that probably once or twice before that age I did enter licensed premises and consumed something in the nature of liquor, and probably afterwards two or three times, not anything more, after I had passed that magical age 16. The amazing thing is that it did not appear to be a big deal. In most countries in Europe you can find the same situation, where 16 is ostensibly the liquor age, if I can refer to it as that, but in practice if one wanted to have a drink at 12, one could do it and it didn't seem to matter a whole lot. There's only one exception, by the way, to my knowledge, and that is Great

Britain, where they insist on 18 as the age. Now, they've always been a little different from the rest of the continent.

The other thing, though, that is different is that in most countries in western and northern Europe the punishment for impaired driving is far more severe than it is here. If you are found to be driving while impaired and you get caught, then you're taken out of your car, your licence is taken away, and you're put in jail. Your licence is taken away for a number of years. So for that reason – I don't know the stats, quite frankly – there appears to be less of it. While I've been there on several occasions, I've always been cautioned not to drink and drive, and of course I adhere to that.

I came to Canada, Mr. Speaker, in 1962, and picture the culture shock as I discovered that here in Alberta the so-called liquor age was 21 and that one could go to bars for men only and then next door there was a door through which women could enter as long as they were escorted. Instead of being able to enjoy a drink, say, in a sidewalk cafe, one had to dive into sort of a dungeon-like atmosphere with sawdust on the floor, undoubtedly in case someone got sick or drank with less than moderation.

More importantly, I went to university here in Edmonton as a 26 year old and had to share a room with a 16-year-old student. One of the first things he did after we met and introduced ourselves was invite me to go for a drink at the Corona Hotel. I must admit, Mr. Speaker, I accepted his invitation. I found out later on that perhaps I could have been liable for some commission of a crime, but I was quite unaware of those rules and regulations at that time, and certainly my ignorance was absolute bliss.

So we did go to the Corona, and I was really flabbergasted by the way in which the consumption of alcohol was approached. Whereas I ordered one glass of beer, in no time I had about six in front of me, and my young friends were exhorting me to down the stuff a lot faster than I intended to or liked to. So I said to them: what is the purpose of drinking here? Is it to get drunk? They assured me that that was an important purpose. Later on, we drove home. I must admit that I didn't drive, but someone did, and to this day I don't know how we got back to our quarters.

It was very much an educational experience. I'd like to point out – that's really the purpose of this – that at that time the liquor age was 21, my roommate was 16, he was freely admitted into licensed premises, and he knew exactly where to get his booze. So raising the liquor age to 19 does not appear to be a factor that will restrain people like that. Education is clearly the important item here.

Now, I think it was the Member for Taber-Warner who gave us a dissertation on the psyche of the teenager, explaining that it was the lack of confidence that led teenagers to drink. I wonder what leads adults to drink, then, if it isn't exactly the same thing or more or less the same thing.

4:00

Little Bow felt that there's evidence of drunkenness at high schools and therefore the liquor age ought to be raised. Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what Little Bow's background is, but I've spent about 26 years in high schools, and true, probably once a year someone would come in there and have imbibed, but that person would then be summarily suspended. That person, amazingly enough, usually got his booze from his parents – that is to say, without their knowledge necessarily – but not from someone else who happened to be 18 and also in the school. Inebriation would occur usually at school dances, if it did occur, and of course that had again very little to do with age. It was merely a matter of liquor being available for anyone who wanted

it at any time. I must admit that at these dances, which I chaperoned frequently, I would always apply the olfactory test at the door, and if they smelled of booze, they would be immediately barred.

Mr. Speaker, I think, as I said earlier, education is needed, and what I find a little disappointing is that this government is more bent on cutting education than seeing it as a potential solution to this particular problem. It's not just youngsters who need to be educated in the use of alcohol consumption, because as in everything else, of course, the pattern is set by their elders, who are then emulated by the young. Therefore, I'm very much opposed to this particular Bill, because to me it is a very simplistic attempt to solve a very complex problem.

Thank you very much.

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

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and support the Bill. I would encourage the Member for West Yellowhead to listen to my comments, as he advised me to listen to his. I can assure you that I did listen to his, and I can confirm quite clearly that we're intellectual opposites: I'm intellectual and he's the opposite, based on his comments.

As I said, I'm speaking in support of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, and I stand and speak with the support of many organizations in this province and nationally. The Canadian Medical Association supports the raising of the drinking age to 19. The Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta Motor Association, the Alberta Hospital Association, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Alberta School Trustees' Association, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and People Against Impaired Drivers all support raising the age to 19.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I have a letter here from Fred Moriarty, and he says, "As president of the Alberta Medical Association, I urge you to support Bill 204." It's quite clear what the Alberta Medical Association says. We also received this from People Against Impaired Drivers. People Against Impaired Drivers is in favour of raising the legal drinking age to 19 years of age in Alberta. These groups know what's happening out there, and they are asking us, urging us as a Legislature to raise the age to 19.

Now, why would we not take heed of groups like this? Why would we not take heed of the medical associations? Why would we not take heed of People Against Impaired Drivers? Why would we not take heed of the Alberta School Trustees' Association? Those people opposite are so fond of quoting what the Alberta School Trustees' Association wants, so I would encourage them to be consistent in their statements, in their beliefs and to support what the Alberta School Trustees' Association wants in this particular case.

Now, all of these associations as well as the Alberta Hospital Foundation recognize that alcohol consumption is harmful to young people not only in terms of accidents but in terms of the long-term health effects as well. These medical professions recognize the cost to all Albertans: that impaired driving, that alcohol abuse drain our publicly funded health care system. A huge percentage of accidents are caused by impaired drivers, and those drivers consume huge dollars in our health care system. This comes in the form of initial treatment as well as long-term care. In fact, I recently heard an appeal on the radio – it was

CBC, I think – from a mother whose son had been killed through drinking. The cause was alcohol abuse. She had lost her son, and she appealed to all parents at that stage of the game to control their children and make sure that they weren't abusing alcohol.

The position of the Alberta School Trustees' Association is also evidence that educators support moving it to 19. In fact, as a board member and chairman for three terms of one of the larger boards in the province, we had difficulty in Medicine Hat because 18 year olds can go to the bar and what we were finding . . . Excuse me.

AN HON. MEMBER: Have another drink, Lorne.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. I am having another drink, but it is pure, clear Edmonton water. That may be an assumption; I don't know.

As I was saying, we had this difficulty with 18-year-old students going to the bars at lunchtime and coming back to school in the afternoon. It became a significant problem in the school system, where these students would go and come back to the schools inebriated, causing problems in the schools.

Support for raising the age by the Insurance Bureau, People Against Impaired Drivers, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Alberta Motor Association indicates the concern that these people have . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Am I causing problems, Mr. Speaker?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are not, no. Just one of your seatmates. Go ahead.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you.

These people have a concern with the high number of alcohol-related traffic collisions among teenagers. The Insurance Bureau of Canada quite clearly points out that this affects us all in terms of the cost of our insurance policies. Certainly when teenagers are driving, drinking, and having accidents, all our insurance goes up. Certainly if we raise the age to 19, as you will see shortly, this will affect the statistics and will affect the number of people who drink and drive. It's very clear. The police chiefs are also concerned about other types of criminal activity that occur when people are inebriated. So these are serious, serious problems in our society.

Now, I acknowledge that these are all problems that alcohol abuse presents for all of society and not just teenagers, and we have to be very clear on that. It's a total societal thing, not just teenagers. However, the statistics show – and I want to be very clear on this – that the 16- to 19-year-old age group has the distinction of having the most alcohol-related accidents year after year. That is very clear, 16 to 19 years. The same statistics from Alberta show that, among drivers of legal age, 18 year olds tend to have a worse track record than 19 year olds. Now, who can argue with that? Those are Alberta statistics. Those are the facts. Eighteen year olds have a worse record than 19 year olds, a fact.

I've been aware of an argument that says that the statistical evidence is inconclusive as to whether or not raising the legal . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've had to draw attention to a number of hon. members in the last little while. When somebody is speaking, it is unparliamentary to walk

between them and the Speaker, and this has been occurring with great frequency this afternoon. No one in particular, but it is a discourtesy to the Speaker and to the person who is speaking. Unintended, I'm sure.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to have you on my side for a change.

4:10

Debate Continued

DR. L. TAYLOR: Some people say that the statistical evidence is inconclusive, and some people may in fact say that here today. I don't know. But I would encourage you not to listen to these spurious arguments, because it's very clear from Alberta statistics that 19 year olds have less impaired driving accidents than 18 years olds. What we do know from the evidence is that the vast majority of studies, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of research reveals that raising the legal drinking age decreases accidents and saves lives, even though there may be one or two, a small minority of the studies, that say the impact is insignificant.

I would like to ask all the members of this House: if it even saves one life, is that insignificant? What is insignificant about one teen's life? If you're a parent and you lost an 18 year old to an impaired driver, that becomes extremely significant for you. Just because 100 percent of the research does not support this, we ought not to abandon it. As I said, it is very clear: the preponderance of studies indicate that raising the legal drinking age will reduce the number of alcohol-related driving collisions.

The Insurance Bureau, in fact, funded a project in London, Ontario, from 1968 to 1973 that showed that after the drinking age was lowered in the province, crashes involving 18 year olds and alcohol increased 339 percent. A 339 percent increase in accidents. Several other studies have shown that in jurisdictions where the minimum legal drinking age was raised, there was a decrease in nighttime fatal crashes among this age group by 28 percent. A 28 percent decrease in fatal accidents at night in this age group. Isn't that enough, Mr. Speaker, to convince every member in this House to support this Bill? Another study from the state of New York found that after the legal drinking age was raised from 18 to 19, injury and death among 16-year-old to 18-year-old drivers decreased – listen to this, hon. member – from 2,584 to 1,551. That's an enormous saving of over 1,000 lives in one year by increasing it one age level, from 18 to 19.

Now, we had a friend that lost a son to impaired driving, and I can tell you that it was very traumatic. This boy was in senior high school at 18. He had been at a graduation party, he drove when he shouldn't have, quite frankly, and the boy was killed. That was very traumatic. Now, if there had not been alcohol at this graduation party, that son might still be alive today. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, if New York can save 1,000 lives, if we passed this Bill and it would have saved that one life of that one family and the trauma that family has gone through, it would be worth it.

I would like to counter one last argument that I've heard, Mr. Speaker, and it may be heard even in the debate on this issue in this House. There are some who say that it is inconsistent to have a drinking age of 19 when you allow kids to vote at 18, when you allow them to marry at 18, when you allow them to fight in the military at 18. To that I say: so what?

We have inconsistencies in setting the minimum ages for many issues. We set the driving age at 16. Does that mean they should be able to drink at 16?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is rising on a point of order. Would you care to share with us?

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MS LEIBOVICI: *Beauchesne* 482. I would like to ask the member a question, if I may.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is reminded that in replying, you either say yes or no and you don't need to give reasons.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Could I just ask you a question, Mr. Speaker? Does it come out of my speaking time?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: No.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Then I'll accept the question.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: I'd like to just know, in the statistics you had mentioned earlier in terms of New York, whether they changed the licensing system as well. I don't know if you know that or not, but it's a question that I'm asking.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I don't know that particularly, but 16 year olds could still drive. Now, whether they made it more difficult to get driver's licences, I don't know, but they could still drive at 16.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Continue.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, some may say it's inconsistent, but we have inconsistencies in our society. You have a certain age when you can work after midnight in a job and when you can't work after midnight. So there's something else as well. You can get your learner's licence at 14. Does that mean you should be able to drink at 14? You can't rent a car till you're 25. Does that mean you shouldn't be able to drink till you're 25? You can go to school at six years of age. Should you be able to drink at six years of age?

What I'm pointing out, Mr. Speaker, is that all of these are arbitrary ages. They are arbitrary and they're set by our society. So it makes no sense to argue that because you can fight for your country at 18, you should be able to drink at 18. I could just as reasonably argue that because you can drive at 16, you should be able to drink at 16 too. These are arbitrary ages. The age of 18 for voting and marrying is something that this society has set. They are not based on some kind of indisputable scientific formula. What I'm pointing out is that we have good evidence, scientific evidence to support moving the age from 18 to 19. This is especially true in terms of the studies that I've mentioned where we will save lives.

What I'm saying is that we should take these statistics and arbitrarily set the drinking age at 19, much the same as Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia have. This is particularly important for somebody who lives in a community like I do that is very close to the Saskatchewan border. We have young people coming across the border from Saskatchewan to drink in Alberta because we are very close to the Saskatchewan border. The difficulty with that, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is

that they've got to go home to Saskatchewan after they've been partying. Once again you raise the difficulty of these young people driving on the highways.

Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and B.C. were all at one time 18, but they have moved to 19. They have seen the sense of the argument. I can assure you that doing that perhaps at that time angered 18 year olds in those provinces. But I was in a school last week in a grade 12 classroom – I think it was Monday of this week, quite frankly – and I asked the students: what do you think about this? Should we raise it to 19 from 18? Students mostly all told me that they wanted it left at 18. I had a show of hands. So about two-thirds, one-third would be my guess. I didn't do an accurate count. I didn't give any preamble or didn't try to convince them. I said to them after that: what would you do if I said that if we raised it to 19, it would save the life of so-and-so sitting down here after a graduation party? You know what they said? Raise it to 19. It's worth one life. Raise it. Certainly I'm sure some young people may be angered at the time, but once they realize the sense of the argument, once they realize that it would save their friend's life, they would respect the decision and accept it.

I find it rather telling that this Bill has had a lot of support coverage in both print and television media, yet the minister in charge of the ALCB has not had many calls, or any calls that I'm aware of, from people demanding that the drinking age remain the same. I made my position quite clear on local media – radio, press – in my own constituency in Medicine Hat. It's been quite clear that I haven't had any number of calls asking that we leave the age the same or we defeat this Bill. Rather, I did have a number of calls supporting my position and encouraging me to try and get other legislators to support this position due to the fact that it will save some people's lives. I also checked with the sponsor of this Bill, and he has told us that he has had many calls on this issue and they all favour raising the drinking age.

So I would encourage all members to support this Bill. Bill 204 is good news for teens. We as legislators need to do what is right, Mr. Speaker, and what is right will save the lives of young people. I can't imagine anybody who is not in favour of saving the lives of young people. If this will, as I said, even save one life – and we know it'll save more than that – I would encourage all members to support it. By not supporting it, some young person is doomed.

Thank you.

4:20

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, listened to the member from Calgary-Cypress . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Medicine Hat.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Medicine Hat-Cypress. We don't want him coming to Cypress.

He talked about being intellectual. I've talked to him. I've never seen any sign of being intellectual. I've talked to his friends in Medicine Hat, some of his friends down there, and all of them have said that they've never seen any sign of intellect.

Anyway, he touches on a really important aspect and probably the one that's in the back of most of our minds in evaluating the merits of this Bill, and that's the aspect of saving lives. I think that's the one that most of us are concerned about.

But, you know, I'm concerned about his quoting of statistics. I find a lot of that, Mr. Speaker, a lot of times can be fun with figures, and I'm suspect of some of those statistics. Maybe they even do indicate an increase with a one-year change in drinking age, but I have my doubts. I'm concerned, as he's concerned, about the arguments – and they are getting to be a bit trite, I must admit – the arguments about: well, when you're 18 you can go to war and when you're 18 you can vote and when you're 18 you can do this and do that. I don't think those are valid arguments, either, in evaluating this discussion.

By the same token, I'm concerned that the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and other members who are supporting this Bill decide to quote the Medical Association. Mr. Speaker . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Hon. members, this is not committee. It is Assembly.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're losing some decorum here.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-West.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm concerned, when we start accepting advice of the doctors, why we choose to select their advice in this matter and not some of the other matters that are coming up in this House and some of the matters that will be coming up in the House. We choose to be very selective in the advice that some of these associations are giving us. Another example I know the members from Calgary, from Medicine Hat-Cypress – I'll get it right yet – talked about is the police chiefs. Well, the police chiefs are also in favour of gun control, and I know what the arguments are there. So I don't think that's necessarily a valid argument to hang your hat on, that because the police chiefs want to increase the drinking age from 18 to 19, we should run out and take that position. I have a hard time understanding in my own mind how one year is going to change anything.

The problem in this province here I think has started and is going to escalate with the privatization issue that we've done with our liquor stores. We've made it more accessible. Certainly members on this side were concerned that with all the liquor stores that were opening up, all the competition that was going to be there, the temptation would be there to sell to underage minors.

I think, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at some of the problems that we've caused. And what are we doing now? We're trying to legislate our way out of the problems that we created prior, such as privatization of liquor stores. Some local liquor store owner who's having a bad week chooses, human instinct being the way it is, to turn the other way when he sees someone coming in, knowing that he'll get a fine for selling to an underage minor. We created that problem when we privatized liquor stores. I'm not necessarily opposed to the privatization of liquor stores, but that was a consideration when we did it, and I don't think we carefully thought that through well enough.

The hon. Member for Little Bow talked about – well, he's the one that sponsored the Bill for increasing the liquor age. The problem with minors drinking is as old as liquor itself. By increasing the age to 19, what are we going to do with the bootleggers that are involved? I mean, a 19 year old – all you need in a high school is one or two guys who flunked out or are older for whatever reason, and the whole school is going to have access to liquor if they're still 18. I can recall when the liquor

age was 21, Mr. Speaker. Although I never did it, I know some of my friends did; got into the bars at 16 years old, in Medicine Hat as a matter of fact. As a matter of fact, we even had a member of the cloth, a preacher, who was bootlegging. What are we going to do with the bootleggers? Are we going to outlaw bootleggers?

Mr. Speaker, that brings up another interesting point. Medicine Hat, talking about statistics, has the highest incidence of teen pregnancies. Well, under this method we're going to outlaw sex now. If there's a problem, just create a law for it, just bring in some new legislation.

Another interesting problem that's brought up. I don't know how this legislation will get interpreted, but what happens if the drinking age does get passed and it gets increased to 19? What are we going to do with wine stores? Will a minor, an 18 year old or under, be prevented from going in and buying those big glass demijohns and buying the grape concentrate, or however you make that stuff, and brewing his own wine? Will that be illegal? Well, I guess it's not illegal if he buys it before it's liquor. The problem here, Mr. Speaker, is that we're trying to legislate ourselves out of what may very well be a problem. What needs to be done is that we need to educate people.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Little Bow talked about power drinking and two cases of beer. We need to teach our students, our youth in high school, that they should be prudent with the use of alcohol. This does work, because I can recall when I was in school that the use of drugs was far more rampant than it is now. I believe the process of educating our youth, the campaigns that have gone on have been successful.

4:30

Another thing sort of amuses me about this argument as to why we need to protect our 18 year olds against the evils of alcohol. You know, we talk, we give all these reasons, yet we create the scenario for an 18 year old – a 17 year old now – that they look at all the things that adults do, the legal drinking age, and they want to quickly sort of enter that age of this freedom where you get to do all these things, where you can imagine being able to go into the fridge and grab a nice, cool Kleinekens and have a beer just like your dad does or just like the adults, because you're going to be an adult now. I don't think we're doing enough, Mr. Speaker. We see examples of it even in this Legislature, of where we should be more prudent in the examples that we set for our youth with the uses of alcohol.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is not to raise the drinking age to 19 because it's going to solve a whole bunch of problems, because then two years down the road somebody's going to come along and want to increase the age to 21 because it has not solved all the problems: there are still people getting killed in alcohol-related accidents. People are getting killed in alcohol-related accidents that are over the age of 21, that are over the age of 19. I think what we need to do is to educate our youth and teach them the proper values. I believe we'll have better success that way than trying to legislate our way out of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to participate in this debate on the private member's Bill 204. I applaud my colleague from Little Bow for bringing this excellent legislative proposal to the floor of this Assembly. I believe it is high time we upped the minimum legal age in this province. Members speaking before me have made some very persuasive arguments that I hope we are all considering carefully. They have made a strong case for the need to lessen the high incidence of alcohol use and abuse among

high-school-age youths in Alberta. In fact, the case has been made so well that I will not add further to that vein of reasoning other than to say that I agree with the contention that raising the legal age will go a long way towards decreasing access to younger teens, and that is a very good thing.

I would also relay to members of my caucus and to members of this Assembly as a whole that raising the drinking age has the support of principals in the high schools of Red Deer. And for every one of the opposition to stand here and purport to defend public education and then stand up to speak against raising the drinking age speaks against those very constituents that they purport to represent.

Speaker's Ruling Provocative Language

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but we've tried on private members' days to make the case that these are private members' motions, not opposition motions, and at the same time not characterize them as government motions. So if we can remember that they are indeed private members' motions and Bills.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you for that direction, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

MR. DOERKSEN: The second main reason, already touched upon by previous speakers, is that raising the drinking age is desirable to take a bite out of the alarming number of alcohol-related automobile accidents. I don't think we can sit here in good conscience and ignore the statistics from the Alberta Justice department that reveal that 18 and 19 year olds are the largest group of drinking drivers in Alberta on an annual basis.

Enforcement is always the most difficult part of legislating, and enforcement of the Liquor Control Act is no exception. This is especially true with our minimum legal drinking age law. It is easier to enforce when underage teens try to gain access to bars and clubs or purchase from a retailer, but it is hard to stop them from getting booze at house parties or bush gatherings, as the sponsor of this Bill has pointed out. However, just because we have difficulty enforcing the Liquor Control Act now does not mean we ought not to have any legislation. I will reiterate that raising the age will decrease access not only to 18 year olds but also to all those in the 14- to 17-year age category who run in the same social groups. This reduction in convenience of access will help the situation from the front end of the Liquor Control Act, even if we are still having problems from the enforcement end of things. I believe there will be a net reduction in teen use if we can pass this Bill into law, Mr. Speaker, because the higher age will actually become an agent of enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to anticipate the Order Paper, but I would like to remind members of this Assembly that Bill 212, sponsored by myself, calls for amendments to the Motor Vehicle Administration Act as it applies to young drivers. There is certainly some overlap between the issues present in my Bill and those in the one we are debating this afternoon, so I hope you will grant me some leeway in drawing out this parallel.

I would like to see a blood alcohol tolerance of zero for drivers under the minimum age set out in the Liquor Control Act. It is ironic that drivers who are under the minimum drinking age cannot be charged for a driving infraction if their blood alcohol is below .08. This is clearly an inconsistency, as they should not have a positive blood alcohol level at all. In addition, I'm

advocating a further zero blood alcohol tolerance for the first 24 months of regular driver's licence.

I mention these initiatives briefly, Mr. Speaker, because I think these amendments would be good partner legislation for the Liquor Control Amendment Act, because they both recognize the dangers of drinking and driving and the compounding effect when accompanied by a lack of overall driving experience. The correlation with this Bill is that the decrease in access that raising the drinking age would create would make my proposed amendments to the Motor Vehicle Administration Act more effective.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard that there are a great many organizations in Alberta and Canada that support raising the minimum legal drinking age. I commend them for their positions on this issue. However, the one group that opposes the raising of the legal age stands out prominently in my mind. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission supports the retention of the legal age of 18, and given their mandate, I find this absolutely astounding. This is a group that was founded because of the recognition that some people in our society have a problem with alcohol and drug abuse, and certainly they recognize that teens are very susceptible to alcohol abuse.

I have read a briefing note AADAC has released on the issue of raising the drinking age, and I find many of their reasons for said stance to border on the ridiculous. AADAC says:

The effect of raising the drinking age on the incidence of impaired driving is inconclusive because it is difficult to control for other confounding variables. These variables include accompanying changes to other impaired driving measures and any publicity . . . [from] the changes to the drinking age.

In other words, AADAC is saying that we cannot raise the legal drinking age because if we do and it works, we won't know who to give the credit to. Is it the actual age change or is it publicity surrounding the age change that is saving all those lives is what AADAC will be at a loss to explain.

In the AADAC briefing note that explains their advocacy of the retention of 18 as the legal age, they cite a very odd finding by a researcher named Wagenaar, who says, "Alcohol, when consumed with care and moderation, can have beneficial effects [because] it acts as a social lubricant." Mr. Speaker, I'm left wondering if AADAC and Wagenaar would have no minimum drinking age at all so that we may facilitate good social interaction, even in junior high schools where awkward adolescents really need help with their social skills. This argument in support of their position is nothing short of embarrassing in my opinion.

Another of AADAC's reasons for opposing a rise in the legal drinking age is because it is inconsistent with the age of majority, and revoking the privilege of alcohol consumption from 18-year-old adults would be discriminatory. Mr. Speaker, whatever happened to common sense? As I understand it, AADAC's primary reason for opposing this initiative is because the available literature in the form of studies and research papers is inconclusive as to whether raising the legal minimum drinking age would cause a significant reduction in alcohol-related traffic accidents. I am confident that the majority of research supports the argument that increasing the minimum drinking age decreases the impaired driving accidents, and that majority is good enough for me.

Mr. Speaker, for a publicly funded agency whose goal is to reduce the negative effects of alcohol to speak against this Bill indicates that they are out of touch with their mandate. AADAC should be only too happy to work themselves out of clients. Whose interests, I ask, are they protecting? I'm asking the chairman of AADAC to take these responsibilities to task.

Mr. Speaker, I support Bill 204 and its call to raise the legal age to 19 in Alberta. Thank you.

4:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Member for Red Deer-South here just said that when we support keeping the drinking age at 18, we speak against the public school constituency, well, I would like to say that this statement is definitely misleading and erroneous. I've just spent a great deal of time over the past few days going to exactly that constituency and speaking to those young people, who are the people who are going to be primarily affected by this Bill, and getting their comments.

At Satou elementary school I talked to two classes of grade 6 students there: 73 percent of them supported raising the age to 19; 27 percent supported leaving the age at 18. At Holy Trinity high school 27 percent of the students there supported raising the age to 19; 73 percent of the students there supported leaving the age at 18. At J. Percy Page high school 15 percent of the students supported raising the age to 19; 85 percent supported leaving the age as it is. So, in total, 38 percent of that constituency who are primarily affected by this Bill supported raising the age to 19, and 62 percent want it left at the current age of 18.

Now, those students spent some time discussing and debating this issue and had some very reasonable and well-thought-out arguments and some that I think should be very interesting to the members of this Legislature. The overlying thought they had was that they couldn't believe that someone had finally asked their opinion on something which would so significantly impact their life. So at all three schools they liked the idea that their opinion was asked and that what they had to say was valid and would be reported in this House to all of the members and to the people of this province.

One of the most interesting comments I found was from a student who said that it's very interesting that a private member from the Conservative Party would advocate raising the age to 19, because that would mean the government would forgo the additional money it makes from the tax revenue on liquor, and given Klein's cutbacks in education, that seems to be a double standard. So I thought that was a very interesting comment.

Speaker's Ruling Provocative Language

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, a few moments ago the Chair was compelled to rise because someone was trying to characterize a certain position to the opposition. What the Chair said at that time and would remind the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is that these are private members' motions and Bills, and please don't . . . [interjection] Well, it appeared to a number of us who were listening that you were bordering on that. If you're not guilty of that, the lesson will fall upon the other ears, too, who may from time to time try and characterize these as other than private members' Bills. They're not government Bills, and they're not opposition Bills. They're not government motions, and they're not opposition motions. They're private members' motions and Bills.

MS CARLSON: Well, with all due respect, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what I said. I said "a private member."

AN HON. MEMBER: You mentioned the Premier's name.

MS CARLSON: No, I did not.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, anyway, we'll see the Blues in time. The point is made. Please continue.

MS CARLSON: Well, I said "a private member from the Conservative Party" to be exact.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: To further go on with what the students had to say, they said that this process we're having here now to debate this Bill was a waste of money, and they didn't see the point of it because you can't legislate against stupidity, and you don't change legislation to solve this kind of a problem because the real problem here is minors drinking, regardless of what the legal age is. So regardless of whether the legal age is 18 or the legal age is 19, the problem that we're talking about here primarily belongs to minors drinking.

A number of members have talked about 16 year olds drinking and getting in their cars. Well, they say that the solution to this is to actually enforce the existing legislation. Instead of wasting time and effort and money debating this, why don't we comply with the legislation that we have now and enforce the standards that are there and increase the penalties for those people who serve minors liquor and for those minors who buy liquor? We should be a lot stricter in our enforcement of that, and the penalties should be much, much more significant than they are. That would move us a great way along the road of solving the problem that we have now, that many of the people here are talking about, including when the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat talked about the unfortunate incident of the son of a friend of his being at a bush party and drinking. Now, that's the kind of situation where if we had proper enforcement, you wouldn't even have liquor in those situations because there are any number of people there who are underage. They also don't have a licence to serve the liquor at a large bush bash like that. So those are the kinds of situations that would be just eliminated by proper enforcement. These were the students who brought this up, the students who believed that it should be enforced, that if the age is 18, as it has been, the laws and penalties should be around that age.

They also raised a point which falls in again with this discussion: that it's discouraging for those who are 18 or 19 who do go to functions where liquor is served to see underage people who are there to make a point, to make a point that they can get in and they can be served liquor despite the fact that they're not of legal age. These are predominantly people who drink too much and get out in their cars and drive and who start fights in these locations. Proper enforcement would once again eliminate this problem. I think we have to give that some real consideration.

They also registered some concerns that changing this law, even with the grandfather clause, is unfair to people who are teenagers now because they have grown up with the expectation that when they turn 18, the right will be there for them to make the choice to drink or not to drink. Now, I'd have to say that many of the people – more than 10 percent of the people I talked to at the high school level – spoke in favour of keeping the age at 18, even though they stated that they themselves have chosen not to drink.

I think that also supports their position, and for that reason I will be voting to leave this age at 18 years old, because I believe that the young people in our province are responsible enough to have some input into that decision-making process.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to my very first private member's Bill since I moved to this side of the House. I will state from the outset that I am in favour of raising the minimum age for alcohol purchase and consumption in Alberta, although I am not sure as to whether the new age ought to be 19 or 21. I suppose that in the event this Bill passes second reading, we could make suggestions for an amendment and see what the consensus is as to what the proper age should be, but I do not want to get ahead of myself here.

First, we have to make our case as to the necessity of raising the legal age at all, and this is what I want to focus my energies on today. Those who have spoken before me on this Bill have made some very compelling arguments, and I would be overly repetitive if I rehashed these points. I will say that I support these arguments, and I would like to make a few additional arguments of my own. These will be largely anecdotal, based on my experiences with my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to some tavern owners in my constituency and here in the city of Edmonton who are indeed in favour of returning the drinking age to 21, as it was back in the days before 1971. The reason for this is that, despite good intentions, it is difficult to tell for certain whether a young person is 18 or 19 or 17 or 16 going on appearances alone. These tavern owners and their staff do their best to ensure that there are no minors in their licensed establishments. In practice, doing so is not always one hundred percent foolproof, of course, especially when the staff is having to deal with a large volume of customers.

4:50

Another reality that bar staff are faced with is the prevalence of borrowed or doctored identification. In both of these scenarios there is a situation in which staff are having to make spur-of-the-moment judgments as to the actual age of the people who are attempting to enter their premises. Mr. Speaker, perhaps you can sympathize with the plight of one who has to differentiate between 18 year olds who look like 16 or less and 17 year olds who look 19 or more. It can be very difficult, especially if they are presenting false ID. With the bar-coded driver's licences and ID which are making their debut right now, it's probably going to help the situation somewhat, but it still is a very real problem.

Of course, if the legal age were raised to 21, these same sorts of things would still exist. The one important difference, though, is that you will have 19 and 20 year olds entering licensed premises from time to time instead of 16 and 17 year olds, who may be able to pass for 18 but are very unlikely to convince bar staff that they are 21. I trust that most members of this Assembly will agree with me when I say that such a situation would at least be the lesser of two evils. Nineteen and 20 year olds that are able to beat the system will at least be generally more mature and responsible than the 16 or 17 year olds that are currently doing so.

Mr. Speaker, over the years I have heard different arguments whenever the issue of raising the drinking age is discussed. Some have even said that if you raise the drinking age, the beverage industry will suffer a loss in sales. Well, this is one of the few instances where I'm not in favour of profit for the private sector. This is not what we mean when we speak of the Alberta advantage. With alcohol we are dealing with a potentially dangerous substance that may hurt or kill some innocent member of our society. As far as the argument that 18 year olds employed in licensed establishments would lose their jobs is concerned, I want to say that this may indeed be an unfortunate price to pay for a greater benefit; that is, unless we could have a grandfather clause in the legislation, either in whole or in part, or just with regards

to the sale of alcohol but not the purchase and consumption. This is something that we could analyze at the committee stage if this Bill indeed gets that far.

In terms of the argument that says that raising the legal age for alcohol consumption would make it inconsistent with the age of majority, that too is a weak argument from my perspective. Entering into a legal contract – that is, getting married, voting, or becoming a member of the armed forces – is not a threat to the general public, but alcohol is. Mr. Speaker, the arguments for raising the drinking age in this province are much stronger than the ones against.

A good half of the organizations that have come forward in support of raising the minimum legal drinking age favour 21 as the legal age. Regardless of whether these groups advocate 21 or 19, I think we need to take careful notice of the fact that they are saying so at all. We are talking about some heavyweight organizations here, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that their support for raising the drinking age has not come without a great deal of prudent consideration. The House has been made aware of these groups, so I will not repeat them, but I would like to make a few comments about two of them.

The first one is the Alberta Medical Association. Dr. Frederick Moriarty is the president of the AMA, and he has taken the time to write to me as well as to all government MLAs, if I'm not mistaken, urging us to support Bill 204. If I may paraphrase from the letter, Dr. Moriarty wholeheartedly endorses this legislative proposal we are considering today due to the fact that it would encourage Albertans to assume greater responsibility for their health. This is definitely something that this government has been promoting in recent years.

I think raising the drinking age will save our health care system a great deal of money on an annual basis. The Alberta transportation study of 1985 that was mentioned earlier in debate pegged the amount as high as \$28 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. YANKOWSKY: Twenty-eight million. I am sure that this figure would be much higher now, 10 years later, when health costs are indeed so severe.

The Alberta Medical Association clearly agrees. Mr. Speaker, the good doctor even refers us to our own Health department's business plan, where we stress greater emphasis on promoting health and preventing illness and injury. By logical extension, then, members of our government should have no problem supporting this Bill to raise the drinking age to 19, just as we are supportive of the Minister of Health's business plan. I would also urge the opposition and our lone independent member to do likewise in a genuine bipartisan effort to make Alberta a safer province in which to live.

The second of the groups who support raising the drinking age to 19 is People Against Impaired Drivers, or PAID. This group's advocacy of raising the age is especially significant. People Against Impaired Drivers has been one of the groups opposed to raising the age in the past. However, after tabulation of a vote by board members on this issue just last week, they have a new position statement in favour of raising the legal drinking age in Alberta to 19 years of age. The majority of the board believes that statistics have proven that in jurisdictions where the legal age has been raised and enforced, incidents of alcohol-related collisions have dropped significantly.

Mr. Speaker, it is my opinion that the very fact that a group does an about-face on an issue is excellent indication that they have been swayed by some rather important factors. The change

in position of PAID leaves the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission in pretty lonely company. I am a little miffed at their reluctance to support this Bill. I will be even more puzzled if this Assembly does not pass this Bill. Clearly, it is the proper thing to do.

Now, just yesterday I received a letter from a Red Deer group. They call themselves the Alcohol-Drug Education Association of Alberta. In fact, I would like to table four copies of this letter. This group favours 21 as the legal drinking age.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but Standing Order 8(5)(a) provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public Bill to close debate before all questions must be put to conclude debate on the motion for second reading. I invite, therefore, the hon. Member for Little Bow to close debate on Bill 204. Little Bow.

5:00

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I truly and sincerely do appreciate the opportunity I've had to bring this Bill before the Assembly. Whether it passes or whether it fails, I believe the questions that have been raised and the discussion that's taken place in the media and in this Legislative Assembly are worth more than any statistic can ever point out.

I know that one of the leading questions that's been brought up is the question of whether an 18 year old, who can legally enter a lawful contract, should be able to now drink, but I firmly believe that those who enter into legal contracts and those who vote at the age of 18 are exercising their right. But, hon. members, I also firmly believe that young people who start to drive at 16 years of age or speed limits that are posted at a certain speed limit on the highway or, for that matter, the age that's established when you first receive the Canada Pension are an arbitrary privilege.

I don't want to single out members who have spoken against the statistical evidence that I did provide, but I think it's conclusive enough in my mind that you can take any of the statistics from back in 1987 to the present day and show that this privilege that we've afforded a certain age group has caused and continues to cause certain amounts of tragedy in different people's lives. For that reason I'm asking that it be raised to 19.

One of the things that I don't think we ever want to dispute is to compare a statistic in terms of a financial statement, the bottom-line dollar, with a statistic that involves life. After all, dead is dead. I don't think there's anyone here who honestly wouldn't do anything within their own power to bring back or to save one life, whether it's a young person or an old person.

I had a caller on a talk show this morning indicate that 21 years ago his entire family was wiped out by a 19-year-old impaired driver. Now, a person can't make fun of that kind of statistic, and I don't think any of us really would. But it's something that I think in good conscience as individual members we want to keep in the back of our minds when we're trying to represent the majority of our constituents. I think of those constituents whom I've known personally, and I'm sure each and every one of you probably have had the sad misfortune of knowing somebody who hasn't been a fortunate person who's driven home late at night, whether it's a quadriplegic or a high school gymnasium I attended with two caskets in it and 450 kids crying and wondering why they didn't do something different. Believe me, at that point in time they would've done anything. A lot of them said that they were going to quit drinking. Whether they did or not is secondary, but they never did bring their classmates back.

I'd like to reiterate just a couple of brief points, Mr. Speaker. One is that 19 years, in my estimation, will give an extra 50 percent or another year's experience behind the wheel for a young driver. Consistency: I believe we'll have consistency with our two neighbouring provinces and move closer to the bordering country to the south. Thirty-six of the American states have moved back to the age of 21, and as I indicated before, it's my understanding that their federal government may threaten to withhold transportation funding if they don't move to 21.

A life saved isn't anything that we can argue about, and I believe, as many of the members here have indicated, that we should be proud of enabling people to continue a healthy, productive life.

Health costs, of course, are an unknown. Nobody will ever know the cost of something that's done that is reasonable, that we can expect people to live up to, that will save them and their families rehabilitative costs, hospital costs, as well as any of the other costs through lost production of work, as well as health and welfare.

I'll be the first to admit that education is a key component in this whole process that we're talking about, but I do not believe that education alone can change what's happening in today's world. I think enforcement, which we've talked about, is a critical component, but I think this is the last little step that we can take to tie all three together – raising the age, education, and stronger enforcement – to cut back on some of the carnage and some of the tragedy that does happen.

Insurance is the second last point, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how many parents there are in Alberta today who have 18 and 19 year olds under their own insurance policy, but I would encourage them to think about it.

Mr. Speaker, I really have appreciated the honour of bringing this forward, and I would now like to ask that the question on Bill 204 be put.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow has moved second reading of Bill 204, the Liquor Control Amendment Act, 1995.

All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Failed.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:07 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Gordon	Lund
Burgener	Hanson	Magnus
Day	Havelock	McFarland
Doerksen	Hewes	Pham
Fischer	Hierath	Taylor, L.
Forsyth	Hlady	Taylor, N.
Friedel	Jonson	Woloshyn
Fritz	Langevin	Yankowsky

Against the motion:

Abdurahman	Kirkland	Soetaert
Calahasen	Laing	Stelmach
Cardinal	Leibovici	Thurber
Carlson	Mitchell	Trynchy
Chadi	Nicol	Van Binsbergen
Clegg	Paszkowski	Vasseur
Collingwood	Percy	West
Dalla-Longa	Renner	White
Decore	Rostad	Wickman
Dunford	Sapers	Zariwny
Haley	Sekulic	Zwozdesky
Herard	Severtson	

Totals: For - 24 Against - 35

[Motion lost]

5:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, on this somewhat historic occasion of seeing free votes twice in one day coming before the Assembly and members voting freely, I would now move that we adjourn and reconvene at 8 o'clock tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

