

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 5, 1995** 1:30 p.m.
Date: 95/04/05
[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Let us pray.

As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country.

Amen.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville.

MR. VASSEUR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition I tabled on March 30 regarding the protection of water resources be now read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to not sell the rights of water to any company, country or monopoly without first conducting a referendum for the people to decide on the issue.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition I presented on the 29th now be read and received, please.

CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to:

1. De-insure the performance of induced abortion under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Act.
2. Use the community-based resources that are already in place that offer positive alternatives to abortion.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling today the annual report of the Public Health Advisory and Appeal Board for the year August 1, 1993, to July 31, 1994. Copies will be distributed to all members.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling four copies of a letter from Wilf Borgstede to the Lottery Review Committee expressing his concerns for the lack of funds for Third World development. I will be asking his questions tonight at the lottery estimates.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table with the Assembly four copies of a letter from the Minister of Health in which she complains that eye care professionals are not acting in the public interest and a response to that correspondence from the Ophthalmological Society of Alberta.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to table 54 letters from constituents in Lethbridge asking the government to reconsider and to re-evaluate their continued expression of the desire to introduce right-to-work legislation.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I table with the Assembly the report of the Ethics Commissioner dated April 5, 1995. The report is with respect to the investigation into an allegation involving the Member for Bonnyville. A copy of the report is being distributed to hon. members.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 30 young grade 6 students from the largest elementary school in the county of Vulcan, now the new Palliser regional school division. The class is accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Sharon Cockwill and a number of parent helpers who came along to help keep track of the kids last night, and I hope they had a good time. With them are Mr. Gordon Roe, the bus driver - I hope you have ear plugs on the way home - and Mrs. Bea Dyck, Mrs. Dianne Daw, Mrs. Diane Broere, Mrs. Kari Thiesen, Mrs. Theresa Henderson, Mr. Frank Harris, and Mr. Andy Broere. Would those people from down south please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 54 visitors from the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. In fact, they're all from M.E. Lazerte high school, which is one of the finest high schools in Alberta. With them are Ms Fran Stewart and Mrs. Brenda Shelton. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague for Edmonton-Meadowlark I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two constituents of hers, Frank and Delores Skolowski. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. KIRKLAND: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly members 24 very bright and well-behaved students from the Round Hill school. They're accompanied this afternoon by their teacher Dan Adrian and by Mrs. Maxine Sych. I would ask all the members of the Assembly to give them a very warm welcome this afternoon.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the

members of the Legislature one of the leading businesspeople in Lethbridge. He's been involved in service clubs for a long time and is now serving as the chairman of the chamber of commerce. I'd like to introduce Doug McLaughlin. If he'd stand and receive the recognition, please.

head:

Oral Question Period

Health Care System

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is seeing double, a two-tiered health care system where if you have the money, you get to jump to the front of the line just like in the American system. My question to the Premier, the man of the people: what is he telling people who aren't going to be able to have the money for their parents, for their children, for their spouses to get to the head of that health care line in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I'm glad he acknowledges that I'm the man of the people, Mr. Speaker.

What I will tell all Albertans is that we will ensure as a government that all people in this province have an equal opportunity to good, adequate health care under the provisions of the Canada Health Act, and we will abide by those provisions.

MR. MITCHELL: Can't the Premier understand that no matter what spin Rod Love tells him to put on it, he is creating and he wants to create a two-tiered health care system in this province where if you don't have the money, you're not going to be able to afford to buy into it?

MR. KLEIN: No, I don't, and I told members of the media that I'm not going to be pushed into saying that I support or that I'm urging a two-tiered health system, nor is this hon. member going to push me into it. What we do want and what the Liberal Prime Minister of this country wants is a definition under the Canada Health Act as to what is basic, what is essential, and what is not essential. The Prime Minister wants that definition. His colleague in the federal Liberal caucus, however, doesn't seem to be able to grasp or to get her head around the issue. Now, the hon. Minister of Health will be going to a health ministers' conference next week, and she will put squarely on the agenda this very issue: what is essential and what is not essential and what changes need to take place within the Canada Health Act to make that determination?

1:40

MR. MITCHELL: Nobody forced the Premier to say that he wanted a two-tiered health care system yesterday. What's happened between yesterday and today that's all of a sudden changed the Premier's mind about pursuing a two-tiered health care system where if you have money, if you're one of his downtown rich friends, you get the health care you want, and if you don't, you don't?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I am not urging it, but I do want this clarification, as does the Minister of Health, as do all members of this caucus want a clarification so we can get on with making some reasonable decisions relative to health care and have once and for all a determination as to what is essential and what isn't essential. If they are deemed not to be essential, can those things be treated in a private setting? Can they be treated in a private setting?

Indeed the Prime Minister, I have to reiterate, raised this very issue publicly not so long ago. As a matter of fact, he first raised it when I attended my first First Ministers' Conference almost two years ago, and I remember the question that was put to him quite specifically by I think another Liberal Premier, who said: Prime Minister, could you define for us what is essential and what isn't essential? The Prime Minister gave the answer, the same answer that I've been given. He said: I am not a medical person, and it would be far from me to make that definition. But he did say that at some point there is going to have to be a determination as to what is an essential medical procedure and what isn't essential.

MR. MITCHELL: I believe in this health care system, Mr. Speaker, and I believe in its fairness. I know that when the Premier talks about defining essential services versus nonessential services, he is talking about a two-tiered health care system, which is his philosophy and which he wants. It's a double vision. It is a blurred vision. Can't the Premier simply open his eyes and look south of the border and see that that two-tiered, Americanized health care system can't deliver proper health care to 40 million Americans?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I haven't been looking south of the border for any advice or guidance whatsoever relative to health care. I did observe, however, as I'm sure millions of other Canadians observed, the absolute boondoggle that President Clinton went through in trying to come to grips with this particular issue. As we go through the problems of addressing skyrocketing health care costs, at least now we have the opportunity through the Minister of Health to get some consensus amongst her colleagues in the federal government as to what is essential and what isn't essential under the Canada Health Act.

Now, what I would ask of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is for him to define what he thinks is essential or not essential. Or does he think everything is absolutely essential under the Canada Health Act?

MR. MITCHELL: Can't the Premier understand, can't he open his mind and understand that the kind of Americanized, two-tiered health care system which he envisions and which he wants has 11 times the administrative costs that we have in our system? Is that more efficient? Is that any better? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker.

MR. KLEIN: The only person around here who is saying "Americanized" and "two-tiered" is the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He's the one who seems to be spellbound by this notion of Americanized and two-tiered. He's the only one who's used them; I have never used the words "Americanized" or "two-tiered." I have used the words "a determination of what is essential and what isn't essential." Again I ask the same question – maybe the media will ask this question – does this hon. member think that everything under the sun, every medical procedure in the book is essential?

MR. MITCHELL: Does this Premier honestly think that his health care system has been delivering all that much in the way of nonessential health care services over the last five years that he's been in this government, that he's allowed it to happen? Does he think that the solution is to have rich people buy what they want to be able to buy and have poor people go to the back of the line because they can't afford proper health care?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, he should be absolutely ashamed of himself, because there is no intention whatsoever of putting anyone to the back of the line. As a matter of fact, it is our intention as a government to make sure that all Albertans have access to adequate and good health care in this particular province.

I will point out one thing to the hon. member. Maybe he isn't cognizant of this fact because he's closing his ears to it, he's closing his eyes to it, he's closing his mind to it, and that is the fact that health care costs have gone up 220 percent over the past 14 years, and he doesn't care one bit about that.

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

Seniors' Programs

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 1, 1993, the Premier promised Alberta seniors: we will continue our support of those people who built today's Alberta. In January of this year the Premier promised seniors: we'll look at the programs and do some adjustments. Four months have gone by, and still nothing has happened. Then, just a few short weeks ago, the Premier promised a review and adjustment of seniors' programs. Why has the Premier broken his promise and done nothing to review or adjust seniors' programs?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I haven't broken my promise at all. As a matter of fact, that process is starting to take shape now.

I will have the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie supplement my answer relative to what is taking place under the auspices of the Seniors' Advisory Council.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to put on the table some of the process that is in place. One of the first things that happened with respect to the Premier's announcement was an informal meeting we held in Calgary to bring some stakeholders together to see what some of these issues were. One of the key things the seniors told us . . .

MR. SAPERS: Who was invited?

MRS. BURGNER: There were 17 seniors groups attending that meeting representing several thousand seniors in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, they said: we need factual information about what changes have occurred and what changes we can anticipate. We are working with four departments to analyze the changes in programs. When that particular exercise is finished so that we have the factual information, the discussions will be ongoing. One of the things that seniors spoke to was that they did not want this to be a very confusing process and that factual information from the start was essential.

MS CARLSON: You created the confusion.

Mr. Premier, why have you produced and distributed this booklet when none of the programs in here have been reviewed or adjusted as you promised seniors?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder they're at 17 percent. They should be lower in the polls because they don't listen. They don't look. They don't hear. They don't think. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie just gave the answer. The process is now under way. I didn't say that it was going to happen on April

5. I said that we will undertake a review to make sure that the thresholds we established are indeed right, right for seniors, and that the other programs that have been put in place and the changes that have been made relative to seniors are indeed the right changes. If changes need to be made, then we will make those changes.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the undertaking that's been given by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, there have in fact been some changes that have been made as a result of seniors bringing forward their concerns in a very serious and legitimate way.

Some of the changes that have been made, for example, to the Alberta seniors' benefit include the raising of the income threshold from \$23,000 to \$24,280. Another change was made by giving seniors living in long-term care the choice to split their income 50-50 or to use their individual incomes, depending on which one would benefit them the best. The third change that was made is that one-senior couples previously receiving a benefit under the AAI program and whose income is above \$24,280 will continue to receive a cash benefit and a full subsidization of health care premiums. Finally, we did modify the definition of income under the program. For example, if no cash is actually received from a capital gain, that income is not being counted against them.

So there have been a number of changes to the programs, Mr. Speaker, and certainly seniors have been very good about bringing forward those types of concerns.

MS CARLSON: Well, he doesn't listen.

Mr. Premier, it took three years to make this booklet. Why is it that there's still no outline for a formal appeal process for seniors, which is what they've asked for time and time again?

MR. KLEIN: It seems to me that that question was asked about two or three weeks ago, and the hon. Minister of Community Development provided the answer at that particular time. Mr. Speaker, I will have him provide the answer again. Indeed the process is now being put in place to establish a mechanism for appeal.

I will have the hon. minister elaborate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the outset of the Alberta seniors' benefit program we have had an appeals process in there. One of the recommendations that was made by the panel that reviewed the Alberta seniors' benefit program is that they asked for an arm's-length appeal process to take into account all programs and the cumulative effect on seniors. What we've done at this point, because we were in a transitional year, is have an interdepartmental appeal process. I will be making an announcement very shortly on an arm's-length appeal process that will satisfy the recommendation that was made by the panel that reviewed that program.

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

Foreign Qualifications

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been considerable discussion recently about people immigrating to

Alberta. I have a concern for those people in my constituency who immigrated to Alberta and who have the skills and desire to make a meaningful contribution to this province. Their difficulty is finding work appropriate to the level of training they received outside Canada. My question is to the Minister of Labour. What is being done to assist immigrants in securing employment that recognizes their training and abilities?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that this has been a difficulty for new Canadians, for immigrants coming to Alberta when they have a combination of experience and training and education but on going to a prospective employer, the employer has no way of assessing how in fact that compares to Alberta or Canadian standards and training and education. So last summer the international qualification assessment service was opened through the Department of Labour, and that was following consultation with immigrant groups, immigrant-serving agencies, and various professions and occupations, postsecondary institutions. Now a new Canadian in Alberta can actually come to that service and present what they have from where they came from, their qualifications in terms of experience and education, and with the technology available, that can be assessed by this particular service and then a certificate of equivalency given to that person that they can take to an employer. That helps them, then, to find work and careers in their own related fields.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister please tell the House how this service is being marketed and how many people are using it?

MR. DAY: Well, the marketing has been, I think, fairly extensive, Mr. Speaker. Certainly through the immigrant-serving agencies, through the various immigrant groups the word has been put out on this. Also, through ethnic radio and ethnic newspapers and in our own major dailies in the career section this service has been advertised. To give an indication of the growing interest, just in the last three months there have been more people using this service than in the first six months since it opened.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As much as this service sounds very worth while, could the minister please tell the House: what is the cost to Alberta taxpayers?

MR. DAY: Actually, Mr. Speaker, eventually I think we will see that there will be no cost at all. There was an initial investment through the Department of Labour of about \$300,000 for the technology that would be required. This is a fee-for-service delivery. Albertans will be pleased to know that a number of large agencies are contracting right now, and that would include, for instance, the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary, the Universities Co-ordinating Council, a number of postsecondary institutions including Olds and Lethbridge colleges, Edmonton AVC.

I think one of the most positive developments – and they're just talking about it today, as a matter of fact, in Saskatchewan with their minister of training and education there – is the province of Saskatchewan now contracting with Alberta to deliver this service. They only receive in Saskatchewan about 2 percent of the immigrants that come to Canada. It wouldn't be cost-effective for

them to develop this entire infrastructure on their own. They will now contract with us. Their immigrants will receive the service, we will receive the revenue, and everybody will be well served through this process.

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

Utility Tax Rebate

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In its April 1995 newsletter the Calgary Chamber of Commerce states:

The "competitive advantage" the Alberta government has been selling to investors from outside the province has been eroded because of a precedent that was set by the province a few short years ago.

The Calgary chamber is referring to the elimination of the provincial utility tax rebate back in 1990. The chamber goes on to point out that although

the provincial government believes that its own rebate . . . is mitigated . . . [by EEMA] this decision still increases utility costs to Albertans by an estimated \$80 million.

I'd like to file four copies of that article. My first question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, what positive steps are you prepared to take in conjunction with the federal government and the Alberta utility industry to resolve this issue instead of using the utility industry as a political football?

MR. KLEIN: Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. We aren't using the utility industry as a political football. As a matter of fact, the utility industry in the province of Alberta is just as concerned about this issue on behalf of their consumers as we are concerned. They're concerned because this action on the part of the federal government clearly discriminates against privately owned utilities. The Minister of Energy and the Provincial Treasurer have been working with the utility companies to develop a position to take to Ottawa and to really urge the federal government to recant and reconsider their position on this issue.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the whole PUITTA rebate issue is really a red herring and that the real issue in light of NAFTA is helping our electrical industry to prepare for American competition, what are you doing, Mr. Premier, to help accomplish this?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, we do want to maintain a competitive position, and the position right now as it stands, with a case of clear discrimination against private utilities, puts us at somewhat of a disadvantage, and really it's going to prove to be an economic inhibitor. So what I would encourage the hon. Member for Calgary-West to do is to perhaps come forth with some ideas, use his contacts in Ottawa and urge the federal government to reconsider and recant on this issue.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Seniors' Property Tax Subsidy

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the minister responsible for seniors, but I'd like to begin by personally thanking the minister for the expeditious way in which he has handled appeals for seniors from my constituency.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Now turn around, and he'll kiss the other cheek.

MR. DUNFORD: I regret that the people of Alberta probably were not able to hear that bit of repartee, but I think I was being derided for trying to help out my constituents. I'm certainly not going to apologize for that to the Member for Redwater.

Mr. Speaker, as we move into spring and summer, Alberta municipalities are getting ready to send out their property tax notices. In past years Alberta seniors have benefited from the property tax reduction program. I understand that seniors are worried about their property taxes. Is it true that there has been yet another cut to seniors' programs?

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer in short is no. I want to make it very clear that there have been no new changes to seniors' programs. We are, however, in a transition year, and the transition is taking place with changes that were announced last year.

Prior to July 1 of 1994 seniors who owned their homes received a subsidy on their property taxes under the property tax reduction program. As members will recall and as you will recall, Mr. Speaker, on July 1, 1994, we began the Alberta seniors' benefit program, which amalgamated the property tax program into it. The Alberta seniors' benefit program is income tested, and the result is that the cash benefits go to those people who need it the most. The cash benefits are going to some 132,000 seniors in the province of Alberta, and of course they are able to pay their property taxes out of the cash benefit that they receive.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister tell us whether seniors were cut off totally from this property tax program?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, again the short answer is no. In 1993 the average property tax subsidy paid out under the property tax reduction program was \$650 a year. In the first year of the transition, when we announced our changes, seniors received a \$325 credit for their property taxes, representing the first half of 1994. Then they would have received an Alberta seniors' benefit cheque starting July 1, 1994, assuming that they were in a category where their income was such that they were entitled to the cash benefit. So there is a portion of that Alberta seniors' benefit cheque that can be applied towards their property taxes. I'd point out that the lowest income seniors in the province of Alberta still receive essentially the same amount that they did prior to the change and the transition to the Alberta seniors' benefit.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: what have you done to notify seniors of this change?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the property tax reduction program has been a part of the Alberta seniors' benefit program since it was first announced in the budget of February of 1994. Information packages were sent out to 206,000 residences, and we had about 228,000 seniors who applied for the program to this

date. They also received notification with the information that they received on the program. Also, we've asked many municipalities to co-operate with us in giving notice. For example, in the city of Calgary, printed right on the property tax notice, there is a reminder to seniors that they will now be paying their property taxes out of their ASB cheques.

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

Special Waste Treatment Centre

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chairman of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation has noted that attracting at least 50 percent of the available stock of Canadian PCBs for disposal is necessary for reduced taxpayer subsidies to the Swan Hills plant. Yet the most recently published statistics from the national inventory of PCBs in Canada reveals that of the 143,000 tonnes of PCBs in Canada, 101,000 tonnes are in the form of soil, dirt. It doesn't matter to Bovar whether these volumes materialize since they have a guaranteed profit under the joint venture agreement. My questions are to the chairman of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation. Is the chairman telling Albertans that the projections for reduced operating subsidies at Swan Hills are heavily dependent on the disposal of 101,000 tonnes of dirt, most of which is in central Canada and most of which can be disposed of through cheaper means there?

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The very short answer is no, but I'd like to provide a little background, if I could. As the hon. member is aware, the treatment centre is not a dedicated facility. In other words, it doesn't simply dispose of PCBs; rather it accepts every kind of waste generated in the province, which includes PCBs, alkalis, solvents, and liquids, things of that nature. Certainly the facility doesn't treat radioactive waste or explosives.

What I'd like to do, Mr. Speaker, to respond directly to the question, is refer to the NRCB report regarding application 9301. What I'm going to take out of this report is from page 73. This is where the NRCB was summarizing Chem-Security's evidence. It's stated in the report:

The waste volumes expected from out of province were assumed to take up the excess capacity over time. On this basis, the total yearly organic waste volumes from extra-provincial sources were estimated to range from between 8,000 tonnes in 1994 to 17,000 tonnes in 2003.

Those volumes included approximately 8,000 to 10,000 tonnes of PCBs per year over a four-year period. So the point I'm trying to make is that while certainly importation is important to this facility, nevertheless there are still other wastes which we hope to attract, and there continues to be waste generated in the province which requires disposal at the facility.

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, the Premier wants positive suggestions. Here's one: will the chairman of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation lock Chem-Security into its projections given to the NRCB and if they don't make those projections, Chem-Security and Bovar eat the financial difference?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that certainly would be a positive suggestion, and I will take that under advisement.

I would like to suggest, though, that in accordance with the terms of the existing agreement, it's not quite that easy. I know that the Liberals like to think we live in a perfect world; however,

we don't. We're working very hard at restructuring the arrangement with Bovar, and we are in the middle of negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, if there's not enough waste to continue to run the plant as we would like to see it run, we have a number of options. One of them is that we continue to subsidize. This government has indicated that it doesn't wish to do that. We can increase efficiencies in the operation, and we're looking at that at this point in time. We can also downsize the facility and perhaps have it treat primarily Alberta waste and accept out-of-province waste. The final option – and it seems to be one that the Liberals seem to favour – is completely closing the facility and not trying to realize any benefit to Alberta taxpayers from its significant investment, and we're not prepared to pursue that at this point in time.

DR. PERCY: My final supplemental is to the chairman of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation. Can the chairman respond to this statement that was in Bovar's annual report? Let me quote it: they will consider changes to the joint venture agreement "if management feels the revisions are in the best interest of Bovar and its shareholders." I mean, how much sweeter can this deal get?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is aware, Bovar and its board of directors is accountable to its shareholders, not to the provincial government or Alberta taxpayers. Consequently, the statement in the annual report is not a surprise to me.

Nevertheless, our corporation is also committed to ensuring that Alberta taxpayers receive good value for their investment. As a result, the negotiations to date have been difficult, but they've been fair. I fully expect Bovar management to continue to protect the interests of their shareholders. However, I don't believe that Bovar or the Liberal opposition should underestimate the desire of this government to protect the interests of taxpayers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bow Valley.

2:10

Galahad Hospital

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night a large crowd of people attended an information meeting in Galahad to discuss the closure of the Galahad hospital. This building recently had \$4 million in renovations and stands zero chance of being sold, as evidenced by the Galahad school, a new building at the time, that was never sold. To the Minister of Health: does the RHA have the ability to turn this building over to the combined communities of Forestburg, Alliance, and Galahad?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, regional health authorities do have the ability to determine the use of assets that they may have in their region. However, as had been pointed out I think previously, the Minister of Health must approve the business plans of the regional health authorities, and it would be expected that these matters would be included in that business plan. The minister would have the final approval and I would say might put some conditions on the disposition of assets.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: are there any regulations that would prevent these communities from operating a long-term care facility under the auspices of a

nonprofit organization, much in the same way that the Good Samaritan Society does in Edmonton?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there are no regulations that would prohibit that. However, any organization would have to enter into a contract. Presently nursing home contracts are entered into with the Minister of Health. In the future it would be expected that those contracts would be entered into with the regional health authority. Operators could provide a facility such as the Good Samaritan Society does here in the Wedman House, which is assisted living. They may look at a number of different options in that. However, the contracting would have to be done with the regional health authority if it was their intention to achieve any dollars from the system.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along the same vein, would this organization qualify for per-patient-day funding, keeping in mind that this is money that the RHA would spend regardless, as well as the funds from the patient?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the regional health authorities will have the ability to enter fully into contracts with groups such as this. However, I would want all people who are looking at this type of venture to confer closely with the regional health authority, because regional health authorities are looking at a number of different ways of providing those services, some through assisted living, some through residential long-term care, some through expanded home care, enabling people to stay in their homes longer. So I think it's absolutely integral for any group that would be looking at this thing to work with the regional health authority to ensure that they are looking at providing a service that really is needed.

Hospital Utilization

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, towns throughout the province of Alberta are struggling to deal with government cuts to health spending. I want to ask about four of them today: Hythe, Beaverlodge, Oyen, and Cereal. Hythe and Beaverlodge, both in region 13, have occupancy rates of well over 50 percent, yet the Hythe hospital is about to be closed. Oyen and Cereal, only some 15 miles apart but conveniently located in two different health regions, are both being kept open despite much lower use. To the Minister of Health: what possible justification is there for ignoring the needs and concerns of the people of Hythe while hiding behind some artificial boundaries to keep facilities open in Oyen and Cereal?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I believe that those comments are very disrespectful of the people who are working in those regions to ensure that we deliver health services. I can tell the hon. member that I take great exception to them. I would invite him to have a little geography lesson as well and also to make sure that he has his facts correct.

It is correct that the Mistahia region have put forth their blueprint, but to the best of my knowledge the decisions on both the Oyen hospital and the Cereal hospital have not been made. Mr. Speaker, to suggest that they are being kept open above some others and to put that perception out there is totally wrong to do. I know that the hon. member is very conscious that two of the ones that he's talking about are in my constituency, and I'm sure

that this could be a suggestion that, you know, there is some possibility that I would have a special interest in those.

I do have an interest in all facilities in this province and all services that are being delivered. I would ask the hon. member to do the regional health authorities the courtesy – the courtesy – of waiting until they make an announcement before putting rumours or suggestions out there that are very distressful not only to the people in the communities but the health care workers that work in those facilities.

MR. SAPERS: Maybe, then, the minister will explain: if it's not utilization rates, if it's not day surgery rates, if it's not operating within budget, if it's not patient demand, if it's not community concern, on what exact basis is the decision being made to close the hospital in Hythe?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would invite the hon. member to have a discussion with the Mistahia health authority, whose responsibility is to ensure delivery of services. I would ask him also to get involved in the discussions that have occurred in those communities. The Mistahia health authority is under the same obligation as every other health authority in this province, and that is to provide a guideline of 2.4 beds per thousand. I also would ask him to do a little geography lesson again and make a trip from Oyen to Medicine Hat and just check exactly how long it might take to get there.

MR. SAPERS: On my next trip I'll have the minister come with me, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, is the minister going to allow the lawsuit to go ahead against the Mistahia health region? Those people in Hythe are very concerned that the emergency equipment which they paid for with their fund-raising dollars is now going to be sold out from under them. Or is she going to direct the Mistahia region, as she can under the law, to rethink their plan and stop that from taking place?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that my ears really heard. I do not think that it would be proper in any way for the Minister of Health to interfere in any pending, proposed, or occurring case that might be before or going to be before the courts. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, the Mistahia health authority has provided a proposal . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order please. Would hon. members in the front bench help allow the hon. minister to answer the question.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the Mistahia health authority has the guidelines for preparing their business plan. They have prepared that business plan. I think the hon. member and all hon. members in this Assembly should understand that there are some very difficult decisions being made out there, and I think we should be supportive on the basis of delivery of health services to the communities.

MR. HENRY: You created the mess.

THE SPEAKER: Order, Edmonton-Centre.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we have made it clear that the status quo was not an option. Yesterday I referred to a news

accounting where the Leader of the Opposition said that there are too many hospitals in this province, but every time there is a suggestion of a hospital being closed, it's the wrong one.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Fairview College

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that Fairview College is currently developing a new program that will see seedling production for the reforestry industry developed within their college in partnership with a private company. I also understand that construction is now under way on college property of a greenhouse that will accommodate that program as well as the private seedling producer. While I certainly support the initiative of private-sector co-operation and partnership with educational facilities, I do have some questions for the minister of advanced education. I would like to ask the minister: were any government funds expended on this project?

2:20

MR. ADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an interesting question referring to the Fairview College/Woodmere Nursery partnership, I believe it's called, that they entered into. Yes, Fairview College is developing a tree seedling production curriculum and plan to provide some hands-on training through a partnership with Woodmere Nurseries. We're encouraging these types of collaborative arrangements with exceptional educational opportunities in specific sectors while not imposing the cost of it and the burden on Alberta taxpayers. The government and the college have been very careful to ensure that this arrangement does not have the result of public dollars subsidizing a private-sector operation, so the answer is no.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. My supplementary question: although no government funds would be directly involved in this project, isn't it true that the operation could receive some special breaks on some of the ancillary costs; for example, property taxes, utilities, labour, land acquisition costs? Could there not be some complementary benefits to that organization?

MR. ADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the college and Woodmere Nursery have been very careful to avoid this type of thing. In fact Woodmere Nursery is leasing space on the northeast corner of the Fairview campus property to build a commercial facility, but there will be no capital or operating funds or labour provided by Fairview College to Woodmere. Students will not provide free labour for nursery production. The facility will provide access to students and instructors for lab work and technical expertise in the tree seedling production. Very clear.

MR. RENNER: Given that the private-sector seedling industry is just now beginning to mature and develop, particularly in southeastern Alberta and in Medicine Hat in particular, will the minister assure this House that this operation in Fairview will not grow – I hate to use that pun, but I have to – by taking advantage of any opportunities that might be there by way of public-sector subsidy?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, it becomes more obvious that the member must have some seedling interest in his constituency. Again, this is not the objective of the program from the college's

point of view. In fact, it is a partnership to enhance training and education opportunities in this sector. Coniferous seedling requirements in Alberta, especially northern Alberta, are expected to increase dramatically, and I believe that educational and training facilities like this one will actually benefit the private sector in the long run by providing highly skilled people, well-trained labour to companies. I wouldn't be surprised if we see companies in northern B.C. looking to graduates of this program for the expertise they can bring there.

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

Freedom of Information Legislation

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A major concern of Albertans is crime. They particularly want to see the victims of violent crime treated with not only dignity but also honesty. Surprisingly, this government now wants to change the freedom of information law passed last spring. The government's amendment will mean that in those cases where the Minister of Justice or his agents decide not to prosecute, they will no longer have to explain their reasons to the victims, the families of victims, or to the Alberta public. My question is to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. When victims of crime and their families are looking for more support from your government, why would you now deny them this very essential kind of information?

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

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we're not. The wording got changed in there from "shall" to "may," and the reason that is in there is that in some circumstances future investigations could be hampered and law enforcement activities could be prejudiced if the information were released. That is going to be left to the discretion of the commission. I really believe that that is important for our law enforcement people to do their job.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DICKSON: Sure, Mr. Speaker. My question would be: which minister is responsible for this insult to Alberta's victims of crime? Is it the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, or has he done this on the recommendation of his colleague the Minister of Justice?

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, there is no injustice. Certainly it was recommended by the departments and by our folks that are involved in the law enforcement side to give them some latitude to be able to do their job.

MR. DICKSON: It's a question of how much latitude this government will give, Mr. Speaker.

Since the local police commissions, as all members know, play a key role in law enforcement, why is this government willing to allow those police commissions in Alberta to operate outside the freedom of information law?

MR. FISCHER: As I just explained, Mr. Speaker, there are only special circumstances when they can, and they are for good reasons.

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

Gun-related Crime

MR. ZARIWNY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Justice and his government are quick to lash out at crime, but the government's actions reveal a softer side. The minister often tells the federal government to curb the criminal use of guns, yet his own government has not dealt with the real issue of gun-related crime. The real issue is that this government has the ability through section 85 of the Criminal Code to seriously punish gun-related crime and has chosen not to do so. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. When the average nonconviction rate in Canada for most crimes is one out of four, can the minister explain why in Alberta three out of four of those charged with gun-related crimes under section 85 of the Criminal Code are not being convicted?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually the hon. member raises a very good point. Section 85 is there as an alternative charge and often is withdrawn. Now, that's a matter of plea bargaining. That is a matter of the Crown, who is responsible for the carriage of a trial, reviewing the opportunity to have a conviction and reviewing the opportunity to move the criminal process along. It is not a matter that only is of issue here in the province of Alberta. It's an issue in every jurisdiction in Canada.

The federal government along with the provincial governments and the territories are looking at a change to section 85 to make it a stronger section, and I quite frankly believe that in response to the public concern it would be a positive amendment.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. ZARIWNY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drawing on the minister's answer, how does the minister expect to reduce gun-related crime when 60 to 65 percent of section 5 charges in Alberta are withdrawn or stayed by his department?

2:30

MR. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we have the same question being asked with different language. The point is that in many jurisdictions throughout Canada section 85 charges, hon. member, not section 5, under the Criminal Code are being withdrawn or plea bargained away. That is why a federal, provincial, and territorial committee has been reviewing this issue and is going to make recommendations to the federal minister to toughen up that particular section of the code, and I agree with the process.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. ZARIWNY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has the authority to do this now. Since police, prosecutors, and judges support the mandatory sentencing under section 85, will the minister take the initiative now and direct his department not to plea bargain these sentences away? Will he do it now?

MR. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the prosecutors in this province and in all other jurisdictions in Canada are well aware of the importance of protecting the public. That is the number one job of the prosecutors who are responsible for the carriage of a trial after a police investigation and charges have been laid. It is in the context of that responsibility that Crown counsel make decisions every day as to how to most effectively deal with charges. They

are well aware in this province of the importance that we put on the safety of our communities and the very, very important matter of violence and serious and violent crime.

We have taken the position in this government, myself in particular as the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General, that our focus should be on serious and violent crime. Our prosecutors are well aware of that initiative, well aware of that direction, and their decisions will be based on that as a priority.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has expired.

head: **Orders of the Day**

MR. WICKMAN: I'm sorry. I thought there was a reversion to Introduction of Guests.

THE SPEAKER: Is there consent in the Assembly to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

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

MR. WICKMAN: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I just assumed that visitor services forwarded you a copy. They don't?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce – I assume now they're in the public gallery; they were to be here between 2 and 2:30 p.m. – 16 visitors from D.S. Mackenzie school, including three assistants, Shirley Wilson, Brenda Bolton, David Shea. If they are in the members' gallery, I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

head: **Written Questions**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places except for written questions 187, 188, 189, 198, and 199.

[Motion carried]

Supports for Independence Program

Q187. Ms Hanson moved that the following question be accepted:

How many supports for independence clients have been transferred to the Students Finance Board for the period September 1, 1993, through to January 1, 1995, how many were completing high school equivalencies, how many were pursuing postsecondary education, how many were taking vocational training, and what is the average amount of grant/loan disbursed per student and the average duration of study?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the government would like to amend and accept question 187. The amended question would read: how many supports for independence recipients have been working in the employment skills program for the period – and here's where the change would be, to the member – April 1, '94, to March 31, '95? Then continuing on with her question: and how many of these employment skills program clients, following

completion of their six-month program, found full-time employment for this period?

The reason for that, Mr. Speaker, to the member: the original motion asked for stats from September 1, '93, to September 1, '94, but the supports for independence clients actually transferred to the Students Finance Board from Alberta Family and Social Services statistical information April 1, '94, to March 31, '95. So the Students Finance Board doesn't have statistics available from September 1, '93, but the government would like to make available the stats, then, from April 1, '94, to March 31, '95, if that amendment is acceptable.

MR. BRUSEKER: Could we have a copy of that amendment, a written copy?

THE SPEAKER: Are there copies available?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, with the concurrence of the House, we could proceed to the next question while the copies are being distributed.

THE SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree to defer consideration of Written Question 187 until this material has been circulated?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

Public Service Layoffs

Q188. Mrs. Soetaert moved that the following question be accepted:

What is the total number of public service employees that have been laid off between July 1, 1993, and February 1, 1994, for each department, and how many of these employees are women?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the government is pleased to accept Written Question 188.

[Motion carried]

Supports for Independence Program (*continued*)

CLERK: Question 187.

THE SPEAKER: Have people got the information?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we've received a copy of it, and I've been advised by the member that she's pleased with the amendment.

Thank you.

[Motion as amended carried]

Women in the Public Service

Q189. Mrs. Soetaert moved that the following question be accepted:

For the period April 1, 1994, to February 1, 1995, what is the total number of women employed in each government department, Crown corporation, and board, and of

these totals how many of these women are in management positions in each sector?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the government is pleased to accept Written Question 189.

[Motion carried]

Workers' Compensation Board Unfunded Liability

Q198. Dr. Percy moved that the following question be accepted: To what extent is the \$293 million reduction in the Workers' Compensation Board unfunded liability between December 31, 1992, and December 31, 1993, the result of actuarial adjustments?

MR. DAY: Well, in this case, Mr. Speaker, the government again is accepting Written Question 198.

[Motion carried]

Workers' Compensation Board Unfunded Liability

Q199. Dr. Percy moved that the following question be accepted: To what extent is the \$293 million reduction in the Workers' Compensation Board unfunded liability between December 31, 1992, and December 31, 1993, the result of a decline in injuries and lost time claims?

MR. DAY: Again, Mr. Speaker, how can we say no to such a succinct question? The government will accept Written Question 199.

[Motion carried]

head:

Motions for Returns

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 197, 201, 203, 204, and 205.

[Motion carried]

2:40 Air Support for Forest Fire Suppression

M191. Mr. Collingwood moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any tenders or contracts pertaining to air support for forest fire suppression entered into by the Department of Environmental Protection between January 1, 1994, and March 10, 1995.

MR. DAY: Not to want to spoil a good record today, Mr. Speaker, but in fact the information is that there were no new "tenders or contracts pertaining to air support for forest fire suppression entered into by the Department of Environmental Protection" on the dates given by the member, and it is only for that reason that this is being rejected today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to close debate on the issue. For the benefit of members of the Assembly the question was put to the government for the information on "tenders or contracts pertaining to air support for forest fire

suppression" in the period of time that was stated in the motion for a return, January 1, 1994, to March 10, 1995. An indication had in fact been given by the Alberta forest service that contracts for the period up to and including the year 2000 had already been finalized by the department and in fact had been finalized at some time in the 1994 or 1995 year. So the information that we had was that air support contracts for fire suppression had been either in the tendering stage or in the completed contract stage in the year 1994. I must say that I am surprised by the hon. Government House Leader's answer. I accept him at his word, that there are no new contracts. What I'll simply indicate to the hon. Government House Leader and members is that I'd like to pursue that further because there's obviously some different information out there.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Family and Social Services Contracts

M192. Ms Hanson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all private companies who have contracted with the Department of Family and Social Services between April 1, 1993, and February 1, 1995, a description of the services provided, the amount of the contract, and whether or not the contract went to tender.

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

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I cannot accept Motion for a Return 192. Because the department has over 110 work sites, a detailed answer to this motion may take several weeks to complete, depending on the number of contracts that need to be reviewed. Because of the amount of time and manpower and resources that would be required to research each of the contracts, the member should be requesting more specific information in relation to contract information. It should be noted that any government supplier receiving payments totaling \$10,000 or more is listed in the public accounts document titled general revenue fund, also details of expenditure by payee.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to comment on this motion not being accepted. You know, all that we really want is "a list of all the private companies who have contracted with the Department of Family and Social Services between April 1, 1993, and February 1, 1995, [and] a description of the services provided." Certainly that's available. Certainly that isn't secret to Albertans. Why wouldn't those things be available? It seems that everything they don't mind showing comes out, but stuff like who's getting what contract and what they're being paid is being kept under wraps. I just would really urge the Minister of Family and Social Services to try to make his department a little more open and accountable for the money he spends and the programs he offers to Albertans.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Taxpayers' money.

MRS. SOETAERT: Taxpayers' money.
Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a quick comment. You know, the hon. Treasurer is a chap who keeps all kinds of records and things available. I suspect, as the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert just referred to, that the hon. Treasurer probably has much of this data already available in his supplementary information to public accounts. Now, the public accounts won't be available perhaps to February 1, 1995, but certainly the amount of the contract should be available through public accounts and the name of the company should be available through public accounts. What is not available or usually listed in the public accounts would be a description of the services provided and whether or not the contract went to tender. I suspect that if the Minister of Family and Social Services were to combine his information with the information that is available through the expenditure lists of the supplementary information to public accounts that the Treasurer produces on an annual basis, then the two of them together could probably produce this information on fairly short notice. The minister said that this may take several weeks to prepare. So? What's the problem with that, if it takes a couple of weeks to prepare? This is information, an accounting of expenditures, from the minister's department. I think what has been requested here by the member is simply an accounting.

Now, as I pointed out, not all the information that's requested in this particular motion for a return, Mr. Speaker, is listed in public accounts. The name of the contractor would be listed and the amount of the contract. Those two figures certainly would be listed in public accounts. The other two things that are not listed are what's really asked for: to combine that information and put it together in a report.

I think this is simply a responsible motion on behalf of the member, asking for some accountability from the minister. So I would encourage all members to support this motion. I don't see any real problem with supporting this.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also concerned and disappointed that the minister has refused this motion. The move to privatize services in the Department of Family and Social Services has moved ahead very quickly in the last couple of years. In particular, children's services and in-home support are just two of the obvious examples, and I believe there are more.

The Liberals believe that whether the government is letting contracts on building a road or on building a dam or on a social service program, the contracts should be publicly tendered, publicly announced and invited, and the information should be available to the public. This is the only way for the government to receive a broad range of proposals and favouritism or political influence can be minimized. I'm really disappointed that the minister decided this should not be public information. I fail to see why.

[Mr. Van Binsbergen rose]

THE SPEAKER: Order please. When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly spoke, she concluded debate.

[Motion lost]

North Saskatchewan River Boat Ltd.

M193. Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any loan agreements, Alberta guarantee agreements, and Alberta indemnity agreements between the government, Alberta Treasury Branches, and North Saskatchewan River Boat Ltd. concluded between December 1, 1992, and February 13, 1995.

MR. SMITH: Well, it's a pleasure to float to my feet on this one, Mr. Speaker. We are recommending the motion be rejected. In fact, the motion has already been dealt with on February 16, 1995. Documents were tabled in response to Motion for a Return 207 as amended. The topic of this one was the same as the subject motion, and in the interests of moving the process along, we recommend the issue be rejected.

DR. PERCY: This motion for a return requests any subsequent amendments to the original guarantees and arrangements. This has been through the courts, and we wanted to know what changes there had been to the position of Alberta Treasury Branches with regard to this guarantee. So I take it from the minister's response that there has been no material change to the original documents.

[Motion lost]

2:50

Provincial Income Tax

M194. Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing any studies or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government between January 1, 1993, and February 13, 1995, assessing the feasibility of levying provincial income tax on the basis of taxable income as compared to a percentage of federal income tax payable.

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, aw shucks. The Government House Leader has prevailed upon me to deal with this in a low, dispassionate, nonpolitical fashion, and I will rise to his challenge. It's a first.

There are no separate Alberta studies on this subject. The Treasury representatives were in fact only part of a federal/provincial working group on this important study. The resulting report was prepared by and does belong to his Liberal brethren and sistern in Ottawa. I would simply ask the hon. member to ask his tap-dancing buddies in Ottawa to see if there is some way that he could have access to this report. As a result, Mr. Speaker, I would recommend that the Assembly do reject this motion.

DR. PERCY: I find it passing strange, Mr. Speaker, that the provincial government would go into negotiations with the federal government without a well-prepared position that would promote Alberta's position in negotiations with the federal government. It appears from the comments of the hon. Provincial Treasurer that in fact they went into this meeting unarmed, unprepared, and accepted what the federal government had to say.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Universal Industries Ltd.

M195. Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any loan agreements, Alberta guarantee agreements, and Alberta indemnity agreements between the government, Alberta Treasury Branches, and Universal Industries Ltd. concluded between December 1, 1992, and February 13, 1995.

MR. SMITH: Anchored as I am, Mr. Speaker, by the weight of the documents that we are going to table, we are pleased to accept this motion for a return.

[Motion carried]

Hunting Licence Auction

M197. Mr. Collingwood moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the list of all organizations and activities that will be funded with money raised from the auction in the United States of permits for hunting an elk and bighorn sheep in Alberta, referred to by the Minister of Environmental Protection in the Legislature on February 27, 1995, *Hansard* page 198, and the amount that each organization will receive.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This particular motion for a return finds its way onto the Order Paper through the invitation of the Minister of Environmental Protection, who invited me during question period to raise this matter as a motion for a return on the Order Paper for information on the organizations and activities to be funded from the auction in the United States very recently of a bighorn sheep permit and an elk permit for hunting in Alberta. I accepted the Minister of Environmental Protection's invitation, placed the request on the Order Paper, and am looking forward to its acceptance.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Well, following up on the sincerity of the minister of the environment in making that suggestion and the sincerity of the Member for Sherwood Park, the government is accepting Motion for a Return 197.

[Motion carried]

Special Waste Management System

M201. Mr. Collingwood moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the latest approved 10-year business plan for the Alberta special waste management joint venture system prepared by the operating committee of the Alberta special waste management system Joint Venture Board as required under article 611 of the joint venture agreement for the construction, ownership, and operation of the Alberta special waste management system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly. The motion for a return as it's stated in 201 on the Order Paper today is slightly but subtly different from a motion for a return that had been on the Order Paper just a while back in that we are asking in this motion for a return for "a copy of the latest

approved 10-year business plan for the Alberta special waste management joint venture system." Members may recall that the motion for a return asked for the latest 10-year business plan, and the response from the government at that time was that there wasn't a 10-year business plan. There wasn't a business plan for this year and it was before the board is my recollection of the position of the government under that previous motion for a return.

Now, Mr. Speaker, article 611 that appears in the joint venture agreement between the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation and Bovar talks about and requires the approval of a 10-year business plan each and every year. So I would hope, then, that under this particular motion for a return the government will be able to provide us with a copy of the latest approved 10-year business plan, as is the requirement, as is the contractual agreement between those two parties in its operation and management of the waste management system in the province of Alberta and specifically the Swan Hills waste treatment plant.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, in rejecting Motion for a Return 201, the information provided to me by the hon. Minister of Environmental Protection is that there is in fact at this point in time no approved 10-year plan. So we are rejecting this Motion 201.

DR. PERCY: This is actually an amazing admission: that a plant that has absorbed \$196 million to date in terms of subsidies has no business plan. When you look at the record, Mr. Speaker, and at the submissions to the NRCB that set out, estimate after estimate, the volumes of waste that are going to come, when you know that the fundamental problem with Swan Hills is the fact that they have a guaranteed rate of return, absolutely no incentive to be efficient – yet there is no business plan that is available that suggests how they're going to clean up the managerial bloat, the inefficiencies in this plant that is sucking money out of the pockets of Alberta taxpayers. One would think this would be the highest priority of government. On one hand, they have gotten rid of MagCan. They have gotten rid of the Husky upgrader. This is the single biggest white elephant that remains, and there seems to be an inability of the government to deal with it head-on.

Regardless of what negotiations are under way with Bovar under the joint venture agreement, they can do something now. They can actually make it work more efficiently, more cheaply, and they can do so by setting out a business plan, setting out some targets for Chem-Security, who runs it, to meet. That's the least you could ask for.

One would think, again, that at a time when they're cutting back on kindergarten, cutting back on health, cutting back on seniors and education, an area where they can in fact save money, become more efficient through the application of a business plan they reject. In fact, they seem incredulous that one would want a business plan for the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, when in fact we're incredulous that there is not one in place, given all of the very evident problems with that venture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say a word or two on it. Not only is it a vast sinkhole where a great deal of our taxpayers' money is disappearing – actually, I guess that doesn't make news anymore in Alberta, because this government has been very, very good at getting rid of taxpayers' money,

has thrown it away on numberless boondoggles and then turns around and tells seniors and those requiring medical help and also education: "I'm sorry. We threw away all the money, mom, on gambling, trying to get rich. So now you and the kids are going to have to go barefoot and with a little less education and you're not going to get your teeth fixed." This is the way it seems to be going; in other words, the old business where the head of the household does some stupid business deals and the rest of the family is supposed to pay, as if it was some sort of conscious thing. I can see why they would have a huge guilt complex. If I did something like this, I'd try to sweep it under the rug too, and I wouldn't want a 10-year plan to get out to show how bad it is.

3:00

Really, Mr. Speaker, the sinner that confesses all and says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," standing afar, beating his chest, is supposed to have a better chance of making it through the pearly gates than the one that tries to cover up everything he's done wrong. Now, this government, you might want to call it, of sin has a way of looking at taxpayers' money. The point is that if they have a plan out there – and they often ask us: "You know, Mr. Opposition, if you have any ideas, let us know." Well, the fact of the matter is that I think we would be glad to let them know. Certainly when you look at the record of this government, this Premier, and the old cabinet that they had together the last 10, 15 years, nearly anybody would be able to do better. I'm sure that some of my grandchildren that are just learning to play with a computer could have done as good a job of managing as the Treasurer and some of his cohorts have done over the last eight or 10 years.

This is the important part. If these plans are not filed, Mr. Speaker, how can we help them at all? I'm trying to speak on the idea that there may be a few clues over on this side that would be of some help to them. Instead, what they do is like what often happens to people that have a bad conscience or have made a mess out of things. They try to cover it in the backyard somewhere or try to bury it and say: "Well, no, we're not going to let you know what the plans are. We're not going to let you know that there are any plans there at all. It's just a secret between ourselves." Really they're ashamed to show what kind of bad management they've done.

Well, I would like to say, not that all is forgiven, but we're all in this mess together, so if they indeed want to get any help from the opposition, the least they can do is file what plans they have. Who knows? There might be someone over here – I doubt if we'd have the stroke of genius to bail them out. How many billion dollars have they wasted in the last 10 years?

MR. BRUSEKER: Two point one billion.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Two point one billion: that's a lot of zeros, Mr. Speaker. That's 2.1 with eight zeros behind it. They've just thrown it away and told the seniors: "Well now you can't stay in these senior's homes as often, and you can't get medical treatment. We've got to lay off the nurses and so on. We've got to make some effort at paying the \$2.1 billion." All I'm saying is that if they file this plan, some of us might be able to help them, take them by the hand and lead them through the morass that they have got themselves into, and say, "There. There's a little light at the end of the tunnel." It's not a train coming at you, as it was, but there's a little light at the end of the tunnel. [interjection] We can sort of reward them. I know the hon. Minister of Health is concerned. She may even be able to keep those two

hospitals open in her riding, only 15 miles apart. She might be able to do that because there's enough money to be saved with this plan or enough money if this were restructured that we would be able to keep all the hospitals open, not just the ones in her riding.

I can't fathom how they have lost so much confidence in themselves, Mr. Speaker, that they will not even show the plan and say: "Look; I have sinned. We've beggared this up. Maybe you can help out."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm absolutely flabbergasted by the fact that we cannot get at this simple information. Simple information. We're asking for "a copy of the latest approved 10-year business plan of the Alberta special waste management joint venture system." Now, the indications from the other side are that there is no such thing. That could either mean that there is no plan, which is a tremendous cause for alarm, or that there is no approved plan, which is equally cause for alarm, because that means that somebody has really messed up there and that the repercussions are going to be felt by Albertans once again.

Mr. Speaker, I think we're getting to the point now where we're not just talking about a white elephant but about a dying white elephant, a soon to be dead white elephant. I think it's terribly important to note that the stewardship of this particular facility has been abysmal from the word go. It includes – and I'm loath to say this – the previous Minister of Environmental Protection, who recommended that the facility be doubled in size, and then we soon ran out of suitable products for the facility.

This is a mess, and I think it's time that we opened the books in order to get a look at what's going on here. I think taxpayers are entitled to that.

Thank you.

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, just want to make a few comments on this. You know, earlier today the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud asked a question: what's the plan for dealing with contaminated soil in other parts of the country? The response from the chairman in charge of the Special Waste Management Corporation was: well, I don't think we can bring that in here, and gee, if we can't get enough feedstock, then maybe we'll have to downsize the project. Now, I find that just an incredible admission, that the chairman says that maybe it's time to downsize just after we've recently spent a bucketful of cash expanding in fact this particular project. The reason for the expansion of the project in the first place, as I understand, was to deal with oil field wastes. So the government then says: well, okay; we've got to deal with all these oil field wastes, so let's expand it. Then they change the legislation so that the oil field wastes don't end up going to the plant in the first place.

Obviously, there was no real plan to expand it in the first place from where it was to what it is now, and now we get the chairman of the Special Waste Management Corporation saying: well, we really don't have a plan to provide feedstock to this facility that needs to have a critical mass in order for it to be economical, because, son of a gun, there just isn't the critical mass of waste product in this province, and the stuff that is in other provinces is probably too far away to bring here.

It's a curious admission of a government that really doesn't know whether they want to be free enterprise or in the subsidization business. They're marching to the left. They're marching to

the right. They don't know what they're doing on this particular project, and they today admit that there's no approved – and I do want to note that the Minister of Labour, the Government House Leader, emphasized the word "approved" – 10-year business plan.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour has shown us that he's not shy in offering amendments when he feels an amendment would improve the question before the Legislature being debated today. I guess we can infer from his emphasis that perhaps there's an unapproved 10-year business plan. Well, if there's an unapproved 10-year business plan, I'd love to see that. If there's something out there at all that says – I don't know whether it's from 1990 to the turn of the century or from 1985 to 1995. I'm not sure what the latest approved or unapproved business plan is. I'd like to see any 10-year business plan: approved, unapproved, this decade, next decade, or the last decade. From what I've seen with this Special Waste Management Corporation, it doesn't seem to me there's been much of a plan at all other than perhaps guaranteeing a few people a guaranteed income, a guaranteed business, a guaranteed rate of return, all of which guarantees cost the taxpayers in the province of Alberta a bucketful of cash.

We know that they've accessed, I think, \$80 million out of the \$100 million loan guarantee. Based on the track record of loan guarantees – and I know that it often upsets the Provincial Treasurer that loan guarantees don't get paid back – are we going to see that \$80 million again? That's got to be a concern, and knowing that there's another \$20 million still out there that could be accessed, that the government has approved, has to be an issue of concern for the Treasurer and members of the government. Yet the Minister of Labour, the Government House Leader, says: gee, we can't give you an approved 10-year business plan because we don't have an approved one. Well, give us an unapproved one. Give us one written on the back of an envelope. Give us one written on a napkin. Give us something that tells us there's a plan, Mr. Speaker. That's what we'd really like to see.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, find it incredible that the hon. Government House Leader would stand and say to members of the opposition, to myself requesting the approved 10-year business plan for the Alberta special waste management joint venture system that there is no plan. The way that the hon. Government House Leader spoke, he said: there is no approved plan.

Let's go back and look at some of the history of this. In the previous motion for a return we asked the government for the latest 10-year business plan. My recollection, Mr. Speaker, is that the response from the government at that time was: well, it's before the board; we can't give you the 10-year business plan because it's before the board of the Alberta special waste management joint venture system. So we say: fine, if we can't have this year's 10-year business plan, then let's have last year's, "the latest approved 10-year business plan." What's astounding is that the agreement between the parties requires a business plan. It's a contractual obligation of the parties to prepare and approve a business plan. So we put on the Order Paper this time that we want "the latest approved 10-year business plan."

So for the Government House Leader to stand and say that there isn't one not only means that we don't have the latest approved business plan; I think what it shows – the Government House Leader is saying we can't give you the latest approved business

plan, and the Member for Calgary-North West alluded to this. Not only is there no plan, what it means, Mr. Speaker, is that there has never been a plan. There has never been a plan under this joint venture agreement. Why? We asked for the latest approved 10-year business plan. Well, if there is no approved business plan, it means that there has never been a business plan for this money-sucking boondoggle.

I want to come back, Mr. Speaker, to the point I made about the fact – and I raise it in the motion for a return – that an article in the joint venture agreement requires the production of a business plan. You know, I recall – and in fact I'll estimate the date; I think it was May 17, 1994. I asked the Minister of Environmental Protection in this Assembly about his plans at that point in time for renegotiating the joint venture agreement. The then Minister of Environmental Protection said: we don't do things like that; we believe in the sanctity of contract; when there's a contract, by God, there's a contract; we don't fool around with contracts; we don't renegotiate contracts; we believe in the sanctity of contract; we're not going to break it; we're not going to redo it. You're not going to break the contract? The contract says there has to be a business plan. Don't give me this: we won't break contracts. That's exactly what the government is doing with taxpayers' money: breaking the contract. There is no business plan.

What's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that this government holds out to the people of Alberta that the new way of doing business in the province of Alberta is business plans. Okay? Every department comes up with this wishful business plan, which really isn't actually a business plan at all. It's not a business plan; it's sort of a wish list. Nonetheless, they say: okay, it's all going to be done now in business plans. Okay? We ask for the business plan for the Alberta special waste management joint venture system. There is no business plan. It's only taking \$23 million a year in taxpayers' money to guarantee a profit to Bovar. We're sorry, hon. member and members of the opposition and Alberta taxpayers; there is no plan for the operation of the joint venture system at Swan Hills.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what one of those business plans was? One of the business plans was for Family and Social Services. Why? Because we're going to do welfare differently; we're going to do welfare better. We're going to develop a business plan. Well, what about corporate welfare? Where's the business plan for corporate welfare?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

DR. WEST: Yes, under *Beauchesne* 482. Would the hon. member entertain a question in debate?

MR. COLLINGWOOD: No, Mr. Speaker. No. No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. N. TAYLOR: It eats up time.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: That's right. It eats up time. [interjection] That's right, Mr. Speaker. I'm entitled to debate. I'm going to do that.

Debate Continued

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that in the joint venture system for the operation of the Swan Hills plant, or

should I say the Good Samaritan Special Waste Treatment Centre at Swan Hills, Bovar under this agreement is guaranteed a profit whether they are able to be profitable or not. Quite honestly, what's amazing to me and to my colleagues and to all Albertans is that a government who is supportive of free enterprise, who is supportive of open markets, who is supportive of the strong survive get themselves locked into this contract that says: "We're just going to keep pouring money into your pockets, taxpayers' money, so that you can earn a profit. Business plan: not necessary, not important."

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has been asking questions in the House, Mr. Speaker, in question period about the operation of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, where it's going to get the feedstock for the bloated expansion, that we now know was never needed, which we knew all along, but nonetheless we got the bloated expansion anyway. The Member for Calgary-Shaw, who is the chairman of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, sort of pulls numbers from the air and says: Chem-Security. Chem-Security operates the plant. We're supposed to take their word as to what's out there for product to come to the Alberta Special Waste Management Treatment Centre at Swan Hills that will continue to generate revenue for the company. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud pointed out, what difference does it make? They're guaranteed a profit anyway whether or not they follow normal and ordinary corporate management to earn a profit. The government sits there and condones that a company that it does business with in a joint venture system can carry on business and not be concerned about whether it makes a profit, knowing that it will never make a profit.

You know, Mr. Speaker, what was interesting about the importation of hazardous waste that went through the NRCB, that will no doubt be part of a business plan should one ever exist – although now we know that one does not exist – is that the Premier of the province said: great, now we've got importation. In fact, he said before that: if we don't get importation, oh, are we going to be in big trouble. Okay. Fine. So we get importation through the NRCB. Then he says: everything's sweet; everything's roses; this is going to be great; now it's going to turn a profit. That's what the Premier said.

So in response to "now we're going to earn a profit," the Premier and the chairman of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation say: let's get rid of this thing. That's their response to the importation of hazardous waste. Now all of a sudden with the flipping and the flopping and the changing and, no, it was never intended to make a profit and, yes, it's going to make a profit – make up your mind. You're going to keep the plant. You're going to sell the plant. You're not going to renegotiate the contract of May 17, 1994, because: we agree with the sanctity of the contract, and as soon as we get importation of hazardous waste, we're going to renegotiate the contract. What changed? How come all of a sudden you're going to renegotiate the contract after you get importation of hazardous waste?

Presumably, Mr. Speaker, all of those discussions take place in the development of a business plan with pro forma projections, where the feedstock source is, all of the things that are necessary that any business practising in the province of Alberta would be embarrassed not to do in the development of a business plan to ensure that it's successful. All right. Fair enough. We've got lots of businesses out there that go bankrupt. God knows, the provincial government knows all about bankrupt companies. All they have to do is look at companies like MagCan. But companies that the government does business with: they don't have to

do a business plan. Not necessary. Not required. Mr. Speaker, it's to the point where you just have to wonder what the message is that the provincial government is giving to the people of Alberta.

3:20

The motion for a return was quite simple: provide us with the latest approved copy of a business plan. I can't, says the hon. Government House Leader, because there isn't one. I say, Mr. Speaker, that that breaks the contract, because the contract requires it. I'd like to know who broke the contract first. Maybe somebody on the government side could tell us who broke the contract first, if it was Bovar that broke the contract or whether it was the government that broke the contract in failing to provide a business plan so that we know where we're going with Swan Hills.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that there are members opposite, on the government side of this House, that are just as horrified as we are on this side of the House that the government would allow this to continue with the biggest boondoggle – all right. Maybe not, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest boondoggles. NovAtel was the biggest boondoggle, of course; unsurpassed. That'll never happen again. Do you know what? I think they had a business plan. I think NovAtel had a business plan. Well, maybe not. Maybe NovAtel didn't have a business plan. Magnesium Company of Canada: I wonder if they had a business plan. I'll bet you that Magnesium Company of Canada had a business plan. So now we're getting to about number 3 on the list, the Swan Hills Good Samaritan waste treatment plant, the corporate welfare icon in the province of Alberta, and they don't even have a business plan. It is incredible. It is outrageous. It is unacceptable.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I could suggest to the hon. Government House Leader that he might pass on to other members of his caucus and to the chairman of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation: get a business plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The question before the Assembly is on Motion for a Return 201 as proposed by the hon. Member for Sherwood Park. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion fails.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:25 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Bracko	Kirkland	Soetaert
Bruseker	Massey	Taylor, N.
Collingwood	Percy	Van Binsbergen
Hanson	Sekulic	Vasseur

Against the motion:

Ady	Gordon	Oberg
Amery	Haley	Pham
Brassard	Herard	Renner
Burgener	Hierath	Rostad

Cardinal	Hlady	Severtson
Clegg	Jonson	Smith
Coutts	Kowalski	Stelmach
Day	Laing	Tannas
Dinning	Langevin	Trynchy
Dunford	Magnus	West
Fischer	Mar	Woloshyn
Friedel	McClellan	Yankowsky
Fritz	McFarland	
Totals:	For - 12	Against - 38

[Motion lost]

Vencap Equities Alberta Ltd.

M203. Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any appraisals prepared by or on behalf of the government between January 1, 1993, and March 15, 1995, with respect to assessing the market value of the province's investment in Vencap Equities Alberta Ltd.

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the government has made it clear that it wishes, if at all possible, to get out of the business of business, and there are certain negotiations that must take place in order to extract oneself from contracts. It could be that you'd want to get out of a contract like Maritime Tel & Tel. There are all sorts of arrangements where one tries to negotiate their way out of obligations or commitments.

Clearly, in order for the government to dispose of its interest in Vencap, with the objective of ensuring that Vencap would be able to continue to be a successful company and continue to have the confidence of its shareholders across the province, indeed across the country, those who own shares of the company - we believe that providing appraisals prepared by or on behalf of the government between January 1 of '93 and today regarding the market value of our investment in Vencap Equities Limited, and I'm sure the hon. member would agree with me, would not serve the interests of the people of Alberta, the taxpayers, the people who sent us here to do honourable, good business. That would not serve them well.

So, Mr. Speaker, given the very sensitive nature of this matter, I would implore, I would . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Beg.

MR. DINNING: No, I wouldn't go that far.

I would ask the hon. member, in the interests of protecting the assets of the people, to perhaps consider withdrawing his motion in his closing remarks on this for fear that a further rejection of the Liberal caucus would be one setback too many. I know that they're just on the edge. We're so glad that they're going to enjoy a break, starting next week, because they're just this close to the edge, and if they got one more rejection, it could impair the longer term health and well-being of my brethren and sistern on the other side of the Assembly.

In the event that he's not able to withdraw his motion, Mr. Speaker, I would respectfully recommend to my colleagues, my brethren and my sistern on this side of the Assembly, that they reject this motion.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I found it interesting, as always, listening to the Provincial Treasurer. His words of wisdom always amaze. There's no other way to describe it. He's just an amazing sort of fellow.

MR. DINNING: That's what my mother says too.

MR. BRUSEKER: I'm glad his mother says that.

Mr. Speaker, the minister made comments about wanting to get out of this arrangement, I guess, if you will, between Vencap Equities and the government. He talked about protecting our investment. Now, the investment we're talking about here is \$200 million. It's a lot of money. It's probably almost as much as what the Provincial Treasurer has in his own bank account at home, I'm sure. The point is that I know that in discussions with the principals involved with Vencap, they themselves are eager to renegotiate. They want to be able to be perhaps a little more freewheeling, a little more independent of the government, and from that standpoint, rather than going to the full term of the agreement set in place - I believe 1984 was when it started - I think that the people involved in Vencap would like to move along and get out of this arrangement, allowing them to be more freewheeling, as there are other directions they'd like to go. They would like to accelerate, in fact, the repayment of the loan that they have from the heritage fund.

So I guess the obvious question is that it seems to me that the Provincial Treasurer has thrown some roadblocks in the way of that occurring. What the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has asked for are appraisals that basically suggest: "Okay. You loaned them \$200 million, and there's a payout that is due down the road eventually when this is supposed to be paid back. Why don't we pick up the pace and get this done?"

The Treasurer in his usual tactful self managed to stand for five minutes and speak at length and say nothing about why he wasn't going to provide this information. [interjection] Now, I hope I haven't wounded the Provincial Treasurer, but I hear some of his colleagues on the back benches there agreeing with me. I guess it sure would be nice to have a little bit more detail from the Provincial Treasurer in terms of what really is the holdup here, either in terms of providing the appraisals and moving this along or simply going ahead and moving it along. Is in fact the government going to allow an accelerated repayment?

I know Vencap has changed the position that they've held with respect to their shareholders. When Vencap Equities first went to the public marketplace, they offered units which were 50 shares and a \$500 debenture. They have now changed that agreement and have bought out the debentures, paid those out either in cash or in shares paid back to the shareholders. That was part of the agreement originally laid out. Depending upon a certain date, there was a price that was agreed upon and a number of shares that could be paid and, in fact, now have been paid out based on that date at the time it occurred.

So now Vencap has restructured that. Things have gone well for Vencap on a financial basis. Certainly they've had a few glitches along the way, but overall Vencap seems to be fairly healthy. Last time I checked to see how our investment was doing, I believe it was trading at about 5 and three-quarter dollars on the exchange. That's up from where it started of course, Mr. Speaker, at \$1 per share. So Vencap has moved along fairly

smartly. They would like to move along more smartly and get out of the business of being in business with the government.

Now, based upon what we've seen with other events such as, oh, the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, where, Lord knows, we wanted to get out of that business pretty quickly – we got out of the business of NovAtel pretty quickly. There are a few that are still out there, like Millar Western Pulp mills. Gee, do we want to get out of that business pretty quickly? Here's one that potentially could be a success story for the government, where they could get their money out and actually get their money back again. The taxpayer would actually see the money returned to the Treasurer and the Treasury so that in fact the \$200 million we've loaned would be back in our pockets and back for the government to use.

So I must say I'm disappointed, disappointed that the Treasurer has rejected this motion for a return. I think that it would be in the best interests of Albertans. I think it would be in the best interests of the Legislature, and it would be in the best interests of the Treasurer in fact to provide this information so that people know exactly where the government is going. Hopefully in this case, Mr. Speaker, a success story. Hopefully a success story for Albertans.

So I would encourage all members to support the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud in his Motion for a Return 203. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise and speak in favour of Motion for a Return 203 standing on the Order Paper. What compelled me to my feet this time is the Treasurer's cry from across the way that this is sensitive information and that we should keep it from the shareholder, keep it from the taxpayer, keep it from the consumer. He didn't explain how keeping this sensitive information from the taxpayers would in fact work to their benefit. The last time they kept information from the shareholder, the taxpayer, or under this current regime, the consumer, \$3 billion, I believe, of safety is what they got. We're going to repay it for the next 25 years at least. So when I hear the Treasurer say to keep this sensitive information from those whom it will affect the most, I have a problem with that. So when we're talking about protecting the investment of Albertans, I believe the best way to protect it is by giving them information on their investments and keeping that information current.

All this motion for a return asks is that the Treasurer provide any appraisals prepared assessing the market value of the province's, of the taxpayer's, investment in Vencap Equities. It's very reasonable, and I'm sure that the Treasurer will soon jump to his feet and say why it's inappropriate to give taxpayers information on where their dollars are going. They're not going to health care anymore. They're not going to kindergarten. They're not going to education. We shouldn't be kept in the dark on where that \$200 million is and in fact how it's working in our favour.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll make a couple of comments on the government's rejection of Motion for a Return 203. You know, it's a bit inconsistent actually, I think, from my perspective, for the Provincial Treasurer to reject this, because I in fact agree with the Member for Calgary-North West

that Vencap Equities has been for the province and the taxpayers of Alberta very much a success story. The Member for Calgary-North West has recognized, as do all members, that there have been glitches along the way. But let's face it; it's a venture capital company. So those are to be expected along the way.

What strikes me, Mr. Speaker, is that it would seem that the assessment of the market value of the taxpayer's investment is going to be a good news story, so it is somewhat inconsistent, because the government does consistently hold back on investments that are not very good stories. They don't like to let the information out as to how badly they have managed taxpayers' dollars. They don't really want that information to get out. But when it's a good-news story, it would make sense to let Albertans know that the market value of the investment in Vencap Equities is doing very well, thank you very much. It will be a good-news story for the provincial government, and it will be a good-news story for Albertans.

We know that the process is ongoing as to how Vencap Equities will continue its restructuring to move away from the provincial government's debt with the balloon payment – I'm not sure; I think it's something like 2001 with the balloon payment back to the province – and there is a desire, as I understand it, on both sides to accelerate the process on that. So certainly there will have been some activity ongoing as to having to make that assessment so that we can continue with meaningful negotiations.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, we've talked previously in our session this afternoon, in Motions for Returns, about how perhaps the government sometimes goes into meetings with no information, no advance preparation. Certainly I know that is not the case here with Vencap Equities, because they are going to be very good faith, ongoing negotiations by both parties: those involved with Vencap Equities, who are working very hard to make Vencap Equities the success that it is, and members of the provincial government, who are looking out for the interests of Albertans. So I think this motion should be accepted by members because I believe that if ultimately it comes out, it will demonstrate the excellent value that Albertans have received in their investment in Vencap Equities.

Mr. Speaker, I might close by saying that if the government isn't prepared to give us appraisals with respect to the market value of the province's investment in Vencap Equities, I don't know whether I should come forward and ask for an assessment of the market value of the province's investment in the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, because I don't think I'd get that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the Provincial Treasurer implore us to withdraw this motion, but I was not persuaded. I was not persuaded for a number of reasons, the first and most important of which is that having served on the all-party committee on the heritage savings trust fund, where there was a market appraisal – the Provincial Treasurer spent \$50,000 on assessing an 11 and a half billion dollar entity. Who knows how much was spent on appraising Vencap? Of course, it should be less, since we're dealing with a much smaller amount of money as opposed to the value of the heritage savings trust fund.

The issue then comes: why would we want this information now? How would we have timed this motion? It's very clear that

sometime after Easter we're going to be debating the recommendations of the all-party committee on the heritage savings trust fund, and one part of the portfolio of the heritage savings trust fund, Mr. Speaker, is Vencap. In the appraisal that was undertaken by the Provincial Treasurer for market value of the heritage savings trust fund, Vencap was one of those entities whose value was not assessed. I know that the Provincial Treasurer, upon hearing what I've said, will say, "I think all members of this House need as much information as possible so that they can come to a wise decision about the heritage savings trust fund in this House after the break." I know he would want us to have more information rather than less, so if we knew what the appraisal was, that would certainly help us in our deliberations in this House. That's my first point.

Mr. Speaker, the second point is, of course, that I know the Provincial Treasurer believes in performance indicators and benchmarking, and what better benchmark by which to assess the efficiency with which his department negotiates a deal with Vencap than to see how close they come to the appraised value. It's like a competition. We'd have a performance indicator here, the appraised value of Vencap. We would then see after the fact what the Provincial Treasurer and his deputy ministers have achieved. So we would in fact have an indicator and then an outcome.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Would that be part of a business plan?

DR. PERCY: That would be part of a business plan. So we'd have the benchmark, and we'd have the outcome. Then we could just throw accolades or other things at the Provincial Treasurer if in fact he had achieved the benchmark or if in fact he exceeded it.

So on two grounds: first of all, more information is better than less in the context of debating the objectives of the heritage savings trust fund and the value of the portfolio and what should be done with various components of that portfolio; and to reflect our commitment on this side of the House to business plans, to benchmarks and outcomes clearly perceived so we can judge performance. We would not think the Provincial Treasurer would want to be judged as wanting in this regard, so we're sure – at least I think members on this side of the House are very sure – that upon hearing I think the cogent debate from our side as to why this motion should be passed, he will reconsider his statement and urge all members to vote in favour of this motion.

[Motion lost]

Provincial Budget

M204. Mr. Sekulic moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of the projections for net revenue or expenditures of other funds and agencies for the 1996-97 and 1997-98 fiscal years as set out on page 15 of the 1995 provincial budget.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I don't think you appreciate how difficult this is going to be for me to say; I really don't. I know in the interests of brevity my colleagues would not want me to speak at length unnecessarily.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's never stopped you before.

MR. DINNING: Having never been stopped before, Mr. Speaker, I will succumb to their wishes, however, and recommend that the Assembly do accept this motion.

[Motion carried]

Penalties against Commercial Timber Operators

M205. Mr. N. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of penalties in excess of \$1,000 that were assessed against commercial timber operators for breaches of the Forests Act and regulations or of the Alberta timber harvest planning and operating ground rules, showing the name of the operator, details of the charge, and the nature and amount of the penalty assessed from January 1, 1991, until December 31, 1994.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you. This is rather an amendment of a motion turned down about a week ago by the hon. minister. At that time he said that he didn't want the little people's names listed and their fines, so we said just those in excess of a thousand dollars, which should fit in to what the minister asked.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, this motion is similar to the motion that was passed by this Assembly, an amended Motion 174. Just so that the Assembly knows what was passed and the similarity, I will read into the record the motion that was passed.

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing an annual summary of penalties assessed against commercial timber operators for breaches of the Forests Act and regulations or of the Alberta timber harvest planning and operating ground rules, showing the number of operators against whom penalties were assessed, the number of penalties assessed, the total amount assessed, and the average penalty size for the period January 1, 1991, to December 31, 1994.

So all of these penalties that the hon. member is asking for that are in excess of a thousand dollars will be included, and I think that should be sufficient. Based on that, I find it necessary to reject this.

4:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yeah. I'll just make my initial statement. This isn't a windup. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. member did speak to his motion as he was introducing it. Now, if the hon. member wishes to conclude debate, he may speak. If there are other members who wish to speak, then they should.

MR. N. TAYLOR: No. I thought I was just introducing it and then I could speak.

THE SPEAKER: No. If you were just going to introduce it, you just move it without any explanation.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Well, except that there was one necessary.

THE SPEAKER: So if somebody else wishes to speak, they'd be recognized.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in speaking briefly to this, the minister did read a previous motion that was amended by the minister. I think in recalling that particular debate – and I don't recall the exact date – the minister expressed concern that in changing the motion as occurred at that time, in fact the little guy, the operator of the small timber operation, sawmill, whatever, would have been required under that motion, so in fact the motion was changed to eliminate the section. The concern that is being raised here again is showing the name of the operator. That's the key point here.

Now, in bringing this motion for a return back again, the Member for Redwater has acceded to the concern expressed in the first motion, that expressed concern about the little guy, the small operator who has a small company. Maybe something went wrong along the way. But someone surely along the way has amassed penalties. [interjection] I don't know that Shirley has any trees in her constituency to worry about. [interjection] Frankly I'll try to correct myself from now on, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly I think someone that has amassed "penalties in excess of \$1,000," which is what the motion for a return says, at that point no longer would be classified as a small-time or a small-size operator. If someone has amassed penalties in excess of \$1,000 and has had something seized, equipment seized, or has been fined, then clearly I think the public has a right to know who it is that is either breaking the law so flagrantly that a one-time penalty has been assessed in excess of \$1,000 or who has had a repeated number of offences so that the total penalty has now exceeded \$1,000. I think the public has a right to know who that individual is. That's what this motion for a return asks for: "showing the name of the operator, details of the charge, and the nature and amount of the penalty assessed."

Now, the previous motion for a return that the minister spoke to talked about average assessments and talked about a list of the total offences but no cross-reference back to whom or what corporation it was that incurred the penalty and for what reason. For that reason, this motion for a return is back on the Order Paper again asking for the details saying: for those that really are flagrant in what it is they are doing, in breaching regulations and, as it says here, "timber harvest planning and operating ground rules," then certainly the public has a right to know those. So for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I think all members should support Motion for a Return 205.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In speaking to Motion for a Return 205, I too would encourage all members to support this motion. I think what this motion does is it sort of gets to the crux of the problem for a government in dealing with environmental protection. I think Albertans will want to know that the government and the department are serious about protecting the environment and are serious about taking action against those who pollute or those who breach provisions of the environmental protection Acts of the province of Alberta.

This particular motion for a return speaks to breaches of the Forests Act and the regulations or to the Alberta timber harvest planning and operating ground rules. Albertans and the Member for Redwater, on their behalf, are asking for a list of those people who have contravened that Act to make an assessment, Mr. Speaker, as to how indeed the department is treating commercial timber operators who are abusing and misusing the privilege that is given to them in harvesting timber.

The concern with the rejection of the motion in this form is that the government in some way is taking sides, is in some way

saying to ordinary Albertans, "We don't want to give you that information because we don't want to be assessed on our performance about that information." Albertans need to know that kind of information, Mr. Speaker. A motion for a return like this on the Order Paper should from the position of the Minister of Environmental Protection be gladly accepted so that kind of information can filter out to all corners of Alberta: that the province of Alberta is serious about breaches of the Forests Act and those commercial timber operators that do breach the Act. By rejecting the motion for a return today with the argument put forward by the Minister of Environmental Protection – I don't think, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans will accept that kind of explanation as the reason for rejecting this particular motion for a return.

There has to be a sense that the province is serious, that the province is balanced in its view of dealing with commercial timber operators and the kinds of problems that can often arise and is taking breaches of the Act seriously. The Member for Calgary-North West did indicate that the motion was amended slightly so that we're talking about breaches where penalties are in excess of a thousand dollars in terms of fines. Those are not minor. Those are not minor offences, Mr. Speaker. Those are serious enough offences that they should be disclosed to the people of Alberta, and it will in the result demonstrate to Albertans that the department and the government are serious about the harvesting of timber in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's timely that the minister would gladly accept this motion for a return, because the concern that exists out there at this point in time about logging practices that are going on in the province of Alberta is very, very real. I think the minister will know and the minister will appreciate and understand that for most Albertans, in their minds, they do not have the time or in fact perhaps the inclination to make the distinction that we are able to make as members of this Assembly. We have the opportunity and the time to make the distinctions about whether we're talking about logging on private land, whether we're talking about logging on Crown land, whether we're talking about logging under commercial timber permits, and so on. We have the opportunity to make those distinctions, but I would suggest and I would submit to members that ordinary Albertans in their daily lives haven't got the time to figure out the distinction.

What they know and what they understand is that the province of Alberta is being raped of its forest timber. They see the trucks moving across the border into British Columbia by the dozens, by the hundreds. They watch their timber, they watch their trees shipped out of province into British Columbia, and they want to understand why that is. They want to understand what the province is doing about that. They want to understand how we can alleviate the concern. They want to understand that it is not being done in terms of breaking the law. They want laws and regulations in place to prevent erosion, soil degradation, siltation in streams. What they want, Mr. Speaker, is a sustainable harvest of our forests, and they want the environment protected.

4:10

I would submit to all hon. members that this kind of motion for a return as put forward by the hon. Member for Redwater is the perfect opportunity for the Minister of Environmental Protection to take advantage of that motion and to establish for Albertans and indicate to Albertans that the government is acting, the government is responsible, and the government is prepared, as indicated in the motion for a return, to answer the motion by providing this information. The fact that it's not prepared to do that, Mr. Speaker, suggests to me and may suggest to many Albertans that the government is not active enough in this area, and it loses an

opportunity to show its interest and its action in protecting the forests of the province of Alberta.

I think the province should take that positive step and that members on both sides of the House, all members of the Assembly, should vote in support of Motion for a Return 205. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate – "congratulate" I guess is the best word – my colleagues on the support of this thing, because there's something fairly deep here. I think that possibly the minister has missed the last week. He mentioned that this was similar to another question I had, which is quite true. I asked in this one here who had been fined, what was the amount of each fine, and what was the crime for. He amended the motion to say, as he has today, that that would just be a list, not a list of fines but just a list: there were 558 fines totaling so many dollars. That's what's happened now.

Then I subsequently chatted with the gentleman, because even though sometimes I try to rip off his jacket, I really get along with him quite well. He did point out that my system would mean a bunch of small fines: they were late in filing their reports, they made a right turn instead of a left turn, maybe on one truck a log fell off on the road or something, and all these things that are minor. So I amended it to be just a thousand dollars because I just wanted to go after the people that had broken the environmental laws of this province and that this government had fined.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think what's basic here – and I'm not so sure that the members on that side of the House really are following – is that our whole system of so-called British justice is based not on charges being public but the convictions being public. We've moved away from hanging in the public squares as a deterrent, but you're still allowed to go into the courts, you're still allowed to look into the court records, and newspapers are allowed to publish who has been fined for what, who has gone to jail for what time. We have something akin to the star chamber developing here or the old Jesuit courts of Spain, where you have a government that is fining people for offences – maybe to the extent that sometimes could put him out of business, maybe not – and no one out there in the public is finding out.

Now, we lose two things when we do that. First of all, the advantage that normally flows from a judicial system which is open and aboveboard and shows that fines or a penalty have taken place is that it acts, then, as a deterrent for the rest of us. If I notice that my good friend has gone through a stop sign and has been fined in the court, that's something that helps teach me not to go through a stop sign. So we lose this whole benefit. The government fines out to these different organizations – we lose any fallout for what they could do as a deterrent or as a lesson to the public.

Most of all – and I think this is maybe more important. You are a member of the bar and a noted lawyer, Mr. Speaker. Not having these published no longer protects the innocent, because innuendo and gossip and that can still reign supreme as to who's been fined and who hasn't and what offences they may have committed when they may not have. They'll say, "Well, I don't want to deal with this lumber mill because – do you know those three that are munching on peanuts in the corner? – I saw one of them . . ." You've got to be careful, because if you take peanuts away from some animals, they get violent. The point is this: it would then be possible to have people in the community being

falsely accused and they wouldn't be able to say, "No, they haven't." If they called up the minister or anyone else, they would look in the record and there'd be no proof at all because there's no listing of fines.

So personally, Mr. Speaker, I think this is something that might make a court case. I don't know. There's usually enough lawyers around the fringe of both parties that maybe one of these days while I'm swapping a half percent beer with a fella, I'll bring up the topic that there's actually a government that goes out there, prosecutes, fines, and disposes of people who they feel have not acted properly, and nobody knows anything about it.

I just think the hon. minister – I guess he's not called Forest Stump for nothing there – is so interested in protecting the lumber industry and some of the larger fines and the people that have gone through the area that I don't think he realizes that he's tampering with a very, very basic premise of the British North American or western world's judicial process. If they have been convicted, the public should know about it, and the public can use that to learn not to proceed along the same path.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, might we ask permission of the House to revert to Written Questions?

THE SPEAKER: Would there be consent in the House to revert to dealing with written questions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed?

The hon. Government House Leader.

head:

Written Questions
(*reversion*)

Supports for Independence Program
(*continued*)

Q187. Ms Hanson moved that the following question be accepted:

How many supports for independence clients have been transferred to the Students Finance Board for the period September 1, 1993, through to January 1, 1995, how many were completing high school equivalencies, how many were pursuing postsecondary education, how many were taking vocational training, and what is the average amount of grant/loan dispersed per student and the average duration of study?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, in discussion with the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, who had on the paper Written Question 187, I proposed an amendment to that which was agreed upon. For clarification it should be noted that the item being discussed and understood by myself and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly was indeed Written Question 187. However, the paper circulated with the amendment on it shows above the amendment original Written Question 187, which is actually original Question 186. So to be perfectly accurate, we have redistributed the piece of paper which has the amendment on it, which was agreed on, but it also shows the corrected original Written Question 187, which is in fact 187 and not 186. I would seek your direction.

THE SPEAKER: Well, first of all, have all hon. members received the document that refers to how many supports for independence clients have been transferred to the Students Finance Board? Everybody has received that?

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

Moved by Mr. Day that Written Question 187 be amended to move that the following question be accepted:

How many supports for independence clients have been transferred to the Students Finance Board for the period April 1, 1994, through to March 31, 1995, how many were completing high school equivalencies, how many were pursuing postsecondary education, how many were taking vocational training, and what is the average amount of grant/loan disbursed per student and the average duration of study?

THE SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree that the amended Written Question 187 referring to the Students Finance Board will replace in the *Journals* of the Assembly and the records of the Assembly the motion that was in fact adopted earlier?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. So ordered.

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

**4:20 Bill 207
Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 1995**

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to bring forward Bill 207 standing in my name, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act. You know, I'm sure if MLAs were to discuss one of the most recurring issues that come to their offices, it would have to be the issue of maintenance enforcement. There is no doubt that across this province – and regretfully the divorce rate is high in this province, I believe higher than even other provinces – there are a lot of single-parent families. If we're serious about helping these families in society, then we have to look at what is happening with maintenance enforcement. This government has made some attempts to strengthen that Act and give more tools to the maintenance director to use. I commend that, and I'm glad of that. However, we on the Liberal side feel that more could be done and more should be done.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

I'm sure many examples will be addressed today when people speak to this Bill about parents who have come to their offices. I had one woman with four children, and her ex-husband over the course of four years had only paid \$139. Now, you and I and anybody in here realizes that that is certainly not child support. In the case of that woman, she even had to move home with her mother and rent out her present home so that she could keep making mortgage payments on it. You know what? That's just not the best lifestyle for that mom and her four children. That's just one example, and I know there are hundreds of examples where maintenance enforcement is not doing the job that it can.

I realize it's a difficult job and a difficult assignment for anyone, to make sure that maintenance payments are being made by noncustodial parents, but I think that anything we can do to aid that ability, we must do. So this Bill offers some good suggestions, and it's an opportunity for every member in this House to speak to the issues that are facing Albertans and hopefully to support this Bill.

There are three main suggestions in this Bill to help improve maintenance enforcement across this province. The first one would be to strengthen the enforcement provisions of the maintenance Act by requiring child support orders to be deducted directly from the source of income. I know for some people it seems like that might be a stigma attached to someone, if something is automatically deducted off their paycheque, but if it were automatic, there would be no stigma attached. In fact, despite the improved collection rates purported by the government, parents continue to be really frustrated with the system. The most prevalent complaint is that it takes so long for a court-ordered maintenance cheque to reach the people that it's intended for, which is the children. I think that's the other thing we can't forget here: it's the children that we are trying to help with this Act. Bill 207 addresses that delay. Rather than make children wait for the noncustodial parent to get around to sending a cheque, a court deduction order would deduct the child support at the source of income.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in the Justice debates brought up this issue in the House, and I'm very pleased that the hon. Minister of Justice sent a written reply to her answering that question. He indicated in it that if we followed the Ontario system, where automatic wage withholding happens, it would be administratively cumbersome and costly. What I would appreciate on that is an explanation of why that is more cumbersome and costly than maybe having several single parents and their children on welfare, on social assistance. Sometimes, you know, spending money in one area saves a great deal more in another. So that was mentioned in the response. I'm hoping someone on that side of the House, when they debate this Bill, will possibly address why that would be cumbersome and costly, because I would like that explanation and it would clear up some things for this side.

It also says in here that the Alberta program already has mechanisms in place to seize the wages of those debtors who have defaulted. That's good, but the only problem with that is that several people brought their concerns about the lack of consistency with enforcement measures within the Act when they are applied, especially true of continuing attachments. Case after case comes through all our constituency offices talking about people who get an attachment put on. For some reason the payments are made for a couple of months and then they aren't made, so the attachment is dropped, and who knows for what reason. That will also be addressed in this Bill, because if the maintenance director had to write down why this attachment was dropped, it would certainly clear up some things, and if he had guidelines to follow as to why it was being dropped.

So the second main object of this Bill is to improve the reporting requirements of the government by calling on the director to make annual reports to the minister. That would include a few things; for example, "the number of maintenance orders and maintenance deduction orders filed with the Director."

The second one would be "the number of maintenance orders and maintenance deduction orders withdrawn and the reasons for withdrawal." That's a very important one, because sometimes

somebody can phone and say: "Look, I've made my payments regularly. I want this dropped off, because my boss doesn't like the idea of automatically deducting this. I want it dropped." Maybe the director will say, "Well, okay; then we'll drop it." Then two months later we're back to late payments or not complete payments, and that is a serious concern that would be addressed by this Bill.

"The amount of money collected with respect to each maintenance order and maintenance deduction order filed." So then you have a clear picture of whether or not people are getting their full payments made, and ultimately, with full payments made, children are taken care of.

The next one. "The amount of arrears with respect to each maintenance order and maintenance deduction order filed." You know, when we talk about maintenance orders in arrears, Mr. Speaker, there are thousands of dollars that have not been made in maintenance payments. What that means is that children are going without and these people are now relying on the government to provide for them, but the bottom line is that parents should provide for their children. So when we're talking maintenance payments, it's essential that these are made, and payments in arrears can't be just dropped at the whim of anyone. Often people end up in debt. One woman was in the office saying: "I have borrowed from my sister. I have borrowed from my parents. They're paying my rent. I'm working part-time. I have three children, and I can't get a payment." Then if the arrears are dropped, this woman or this man or whoever has the children has to pay back those debts somehow, yet the arrears are often dropped. That would be addressed in this Bill, that at least that would have to be reported before any arrears got dropped and the reasons why.

The next one is

the amount of arrears that have been reduced or eliminated and the reasons for the reduction or elimination of the arrears [for] each maintenance order and maintenance deduction order filed.

So it would have to be known why those arrears were canceled, and that's only fair to parents and children.

4:30

Finally, the third main issue this Bill addresses is that it introduces important considerations that must be taken into account prior to the director terminating a continuing attachment. These things would have to be included in it:

- (a) the debtor's record for paying child maintenance,
- (b) the amount of arrears owing, if any,
- (c) the financial circumstances of the debtor's child or children,
- (d) the wishes of the creditor.

So this is a reasonable object of this Bill: that annual reporting to the minister include for the first time the amount of arrears that have been reduced or eliminated and the reasons for the deduction or the elimination.

Calling for mandatory annual reporting to the minister ensures that regular tracking and documenting of the caseloads are happening, and that makes good sense. If something is being tracked and you know what's happening, then you can do something about it. If you see that so many cases are being handled and handled well, then you know the system is working. But if you see other cases and obviously it's going up that more payments are in arrears, more people are going to maintenance enforcement with problems, if this is annually reported, then people can deal with it. The government can deal with it. The minister can deal with it and help out parents and their children.

Basically, there are a few ways as to how this program would really work. The first step would be that an income deduction

order is made by the courts at the same time a child support order is issued. Then the parent ordered to make the payments must give the court the name and address of his or her employer. If this were standard across the province, it would not have any stigma attached to it. It would be easily done, and it would be a standard that everybody knew just automatically happened. I'm not saying it would solve every maintenance problem in this province, but certainly it would be another tool for the maintenance enforcement people to deal with.

The second step would be that the maintenance enforcement officer sends a maintenance deduction notice to the employer, and it's up to the employer to deduct the support payments from the parent's wages. So there again it's less bureaucracy. It goes right to the employer, it's deducted off the cheque, and then the employer sends the amount deducted to the maintenance enforcement officer, which pays the recipient.

The biggest thing with this, too, is time. How often do the custodial parents get cheques later in the month? Now, you and I know that our mortgage payment is due on a certain day and maybe a vehicle payment is due on a certain day and our power bills and our gas bills. You know, you have to pay those on time or they add up, or you only pay part of them and then you're in trouble and the bills get higher and higher. There's a date on everything that it must be paid. Well, why is that different for single parents of children than anybody else? They need that money on time, and the way the system is working now – and I would say it's probably one of the biggest issues – is that the cheques never come on time. Some of them do; some of them don't. But if it was automatically deducted at source and automatically sent to maintenance enforcement, it would be there on time. I think, living in a society where we have all kinds of deadlines and all kinds of commitments at a certain time of the month where you must pay a bill on time, it's a simple solution for a problem that is a big problem across this province.

A few more things. Bill 207 represents some simple changes, but I think they signal a dynamic difference in the way Liberals look at the maintenance enforcement system. I'm hoping that maybe the other side of the House will see the advantages of this and realize that collecting child support in the same way as we do income tax, through payroll deduction, reduces the need for costly garnishees and avoids delays. I just want to say that it reduces the need for costly garnishees and avoids delays. We are proposing a system that is geared to meet the needs of the people it is designed to help, and that's custodial parents and, most importantly, their children.

I urge all members of the House to truly consider this Bill. I know it's standard in here that if it's a private member from this side of the House, it's automatically said, "I thank the member for bringing forward this Bill, but" – but – "we're not ready to do this at this time," or, "It's good, but . . ." Well, this is an amendment to the present Act, so if there are some things you don't like about this, certainly we can discuss it in committee. Certainly we can talk and debate things. You know, we don't win too many votes on this side of the House, so anything you wanted changed or renegotiated could probably go through. I urge the members to really realize that this is a provincewide problem to far too many people. If we started looking at alternatives that have proven to work in Ontario – and this Bill is based upon a lot of the things that Ontario has put forward . . .

I see the Member for Calgary-East shaking his head "no." I'll be anxious to hear his comments because I know he feels seriously about maintenance enforcement, as well, and is well aware of the

issues facing single parents and their children. So you never know; he may well support this Bill, as I supported his last session. [interjections] I did in the end. Mr. Speaker, let me clarify something. I had some concerns about it, and we discussed it. At the end, if you read *Hansard*, it was passed in the House. I did not stand and vote against it. So I would urge that the Member for Calgary-East, before he reads the script in front of him, looks into his heart and really sees that this Bill is meant . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: Aren't you assuming a lot?

MRS. SOETAERT: I'm assuming a lot, that he has a heart? No. I'm sure he has a heart, Member for Calgary-North West.

If you seriously look at this, you realize that the bottom line is not grandstanding on any issue. It's just saying: you know what? There are parents and children who need more from us as legislators. We have to help them with this situation. It's a serious problem across this province. Some methods are in effect and helping it but are by no means addressing the bigger problem that we have in this province.

So I urge all members, before they just read by rote what they want to say about this or what has possibly been written for them, to really consider the three main issues in this Bill: deducting right at source, having more reporting by the director so we know what to deal with and especially in regards to arrears, and that no attachment can be terminated without the director filing a report. Those are really three very basic changes that I think would certainly help to address the problem of maintenance enforcement across this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would hope that every member of this Assembly would give due thought and consideration to supporting this Bill. Thank you very much.

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

4:40

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the hon. member voted for my Bill in the last spring session because it was a good Bill, but I'm going to vote against her Bill because it's a flawed Bill.

The purpose of Bill 207 is to deal with the issue of maintenance enforcement specifically by attaching the wages of all debtors, irrespective of whether or not they have a history of default. Well, Mr. Speaker, while I commend the efforts of the member to bring this idea before the House, I feel that the government has already dealt with the issue of maintenance enforcement in a very real and effective way. Alberta has one of the best maintenance enforcement programs in this country. It was established in 1986, after a careful scrutiny of existing programs within Canada and those in other countries. Since our program was established, other provinces have developed programs that are similar to ours. In fact, Ontario sent delegations to Alberta nine times to study our program before setting up their maintenance enforcement program. They considered our program so effective and successful that they wanted to see how they could model their system after ours.

Mr. Speaker, our program has proven to be remarkably effective. Since it was established, \$323.3 million has been collected from creditors and \$79.7 million has been collected on behalf of persons receiving social assistance payments. I would like to go through some statistics that we just obtained from the Department of Justice. At the present time we have 35,326 active accounts. Net receipts collected for the month of March, \$8,085,046. Received from other jurisdictions, \$674,000. Crown

collections disbursed for social services, \$1,072,710. Children registered, 49,500. Telephone calls received for the month of March, 27,441. Total full restrictions on drivers' licences for the month of March, 1,320. Total funds collected for the fiscal year 1994-95, ended March 31, 1995, are \$83,160,000. The total funds collected since the program inception in 1986 are \$411,300,000. Our program is continually working and improving.

MRS. SOETAERT: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert rising on a point of order, which you're going to share with us.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. *Beauchesne* 482. Would the member entertain a question?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Under 482 you are entitled to ask if the member speaking may answer a question. The hon. member only needs to say yes or no. If the answer is no, you don't need to give reasons.

Hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Mr. Speaker, I did not interrupt her while she was speaking and would appreciate it if she was not interrupting me.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'll take that as no.

Debate Continued

MR. DECORE: Pussycat, pussycat.

MR. AMERY: Look who's talking. Look who's talking.

Mr. Speaker, our program is working by working with other maintenance enforcement programs and by implementing operational enhancements.

Mr. Speaker, maintenance enforcement is an issue that I am personally very interested in. I introduced Bill 22, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, during last year's spring session. This Bill gave the director of maintenance enforcement the power to instruct the registrar of motor vehicles to withhold the provision of motor vehicle services to those persons who are negligent in making their maintenance payments. This Bill increased the powers of the maintenance enforcement program to force parents to live up to their responsibility if they refused to do so willingly.

Mr. Speaker, there are already signs that this is working. On March 2, 1995, there was an article in the *Edmonton Journal* about a man who for eight years defied maintenance enforcement orders and attempts to get him to financially support his children. This man paid up an accumulated debt of \$16,000 almost overnight when he found it was the only way he could continue to drive. Last week a man from Calgary called me at my constituency office. He was not able to renew his driver's licence because he had neglected to pay his maintenance. When he called the maintenance enforcement program to arrange for payments, he was asked whether he could pay \$50 a month. He replied that he could pay \$150 a month, as long as he could renew his driver's licence. These are just some of the many examples. Today our program has the broadest range of enforcement tools of any maintenance enforcement program in Canada.

The hon. member would like to see the government follow Ontario's lead in maintenance enforcement through automatic

deduction as a tool for forcing people to live up to their parental responsibilities. Well, I have to repeat myself to the hon. member, as I explained this to her during the last spring session. We have looked at this method to see how it would work in Alberta, and we found out that it would not be a feasible method of collection of maintenance orders in this province. Mr. Speaker, to follow Ontario would be a step backward and definitely a step in the wrong direction. Right now Ontario is piling up its debts and deficit sky-high, and I am not sure that we should be following in their footsteps at all.

Mr. Speaker, the cost would be unacceptably high to implement an automatic deduction for all debtors registered with the program, as most debtors pay their orders. Our program uses a continuing attachment mechanism only for those debtors in default. This is a very expedient process which requires no additional court order, and it can be faxed immediately to the employer. If the employer is unknown, traces and searches are initiated to identify employers when a continuing attachment is deemed necessary. This continuing attachment is in effect for five years, and it can be automatically renewed, if required.

What the hon. member proposes in Bill 207 would only create red tape and would make the program less efficient. To implement such a measure would only increase the bureaucracy of maintenance enforcement by requiring wage garnishment even in cases where there may never be payment problems. This would incur an unnecessary expense to both the employers and to the program.

Mr. Speaker, in many sections of this Bill it is proposed that the court be required to make, suspend, or amend maintenance deduction orders. These court-related procedures are very time consuming and create considerable court backlogs. This continual scheduling of court hearings could be used by the debtor as a potential delaying tactic to avoid paying maintenance. Is this really what the hon. member would like to see happen, for a debtor to use this as a delaying tactic? I hope not.

Mr. Speaker, what Bill 207 proposes would also be an administrative nightmare for employers. This might prevent employers from hiring someone, if they knew that they would be responsible for arranging the maintenance orders owed by their potential employees. If this happens, we would in effect be preventing that which we are trying to accomplish. If a person doesn't have a job, he or she cannot make the payments.

The Alberta program respects the privacy of the parties involved. What Bill 207 suggests would infringe on the privacy of the majority of debtors, who are in good standing. By automatically attaching wages, we would be informing employers and perhaps others of private information that they do not need to know, like the details of a divorce settlement.

Does the hon. member propose to punish those who act in good faith? Again, I hope not. The government's current program focuses its energy on those in bad standing. By involving the courts and the employers across the board, the government would essentially be making criminals out of citizens who live up to their commitments. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we would be lumping the good guys with the bad ones.

4:50

Alberta now has a model program that the rest of Canada is looking up to. Other provinces wish they could have a program as effective as ours. Our program works together with the people in an environment of co-operation instead of one of confrontation, Mr. Speaker. At a time when finding a job can be challenging enough, our program doesn't add an extra hurdle that a debtor has

to overcome in order to get a job. Bill 207 is indeed a step in the wrong direction.

Mr. Speaker, the cost to implement the program would be unacceptably high. How would the hon. member suggest that we fund this? Bill 207 increases the bureaucracy of the maintenance enforcement program. Increasing government bureaucracy seems to be something that the members of the opposition see as good government, but this caucus believes in cutting red tape whenever possible to provide Albertans with a more expedient, efficient, and effective government. I know that my constituents would like to see that.

Right now the Alberta maintenance enforcement program has the broadest range of enforcement tools of any maintenance enforcement program in this country, and it is fair to both the creditors and the debtors. Mr. Speaker, this is why I cannot support Bill 207, and I would encourage all members of this House to vote against it.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to speak to this Bill. Maintenance has been near and dear to my heart for some years. I remember trying years ago, even before I was elected to the House, to move into looking at systems of double A – they used to call it that about 15 years ago – in Austria and Australia. Both had used the system of deducting at source. Once the court had decided what the payment should be, then it was removed from the field of personal negotiations and family strife, and it was deducted at source just the same way as income tax. If you run into problems with income tax or even, for that matter, the Alberta government or with your friendly mortgage company, after the court finishes with you, they decide. You get a statement and a collection takes place, usually at source.

Now, the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is two or three things. I know the hon. member brought up efficiency over there, the question that maybe it would be a bigger bureaucracy. I doubt it. If the income tax people and the banks and the mortgage companies use that as a system of collecting money, it can't be that hard.

We'll move on from that. The big thing to remember in maintenance payments is that we have a spouse, usually a woman but it could be a man, that's back looking after the family. The stability of that income coming in each month is very, very important to the stability of the family. A mother that has to sit there and wonder whether the payments are going to come in or not, whether to call up the government to try to get them to go ahead with the maintenance enforcement, doesn't make for a happy home life. You've got a couple of children there to worry about, too, and a landlord barking away. So she's going to feel at times as if she's up to her armpits in creditors, and here she has to deal with some bureaucrat, who in turn is going to try to get the money out of the one that's not paying up.

Now, certainly, Mr. Speaker – and this is what I used to argue some years ago – if society argues, and they often do, that a single-parent family or a poor family with a second parent is the source of a great deal of our troubles with younger people and where crime comes from, surely one of the best investments you can make is to try to make that home environment of the single parent that's depending on maintenance enforcement as stable as possible. Actually, in Australia and Austria they go further than

to strike off at the source; they actually mail a cheque. Then they try to collect, but if they can't collect it, they're still out the cheque. The point is that they have a stable family environment, and the single parent and the children can go ahead and not have to worry whether the money is coming in to pay for the books or for the rent and so on.

The other thing to remember is that in the case of a single parent waiting for maintenance payments, these people couldn't get along together. That's why there was a divorce. That's why their marriage broke down. Yet society says: go back into that bear pit and try to collect money before you come back to us. Go back into that bear pit and try to get something done which, you know, they couldn't do when they were living together, when they were supposedly happy and the whole thing broke down. So to turn the parent that has to look after the children into a tax collector or a sheriff to go out and get the money is absolutely foolish. It seems to me it's only logical that the government should be in a position to be able to put in position the deduction at source.

Now, there's another side to this too. Suppose we have, as some of the people on the other side say, that poor innocent man working away, and he just forgot to send in the cheque or anything else and is quite innocent. All of a sudden the government sends a telex or a fax to his employer and raises the dickens because the maintenance payment isn't there. Maybe there are those types of innocent people out there that really can't get around to paying their bills on time each month, and he really is well intentioned and wants to look after his ex-wife and children but didn't get around to it. That does more to hurt his reputation, to have the government suddenly come in to his employer and ask for it, whereas if it had been taken off month after month and year after year until the child has reached 18 or whatever it was, there is no particular black mark to it.

As you know, there are all kinds of broken marriages out there. There is no particular black mark about having a broken marriage, but there is a black mark if you dodge paying your legal debt to help raise the family. That's what would be attractive. What happens now under the system the Alberta government is using is that not only does it lack stability of income for the single parent raising a family, but occasionally under the system they go about, it gives a black mark to the odd innocent person out there. I must admit that I think there's just the odd one, because I don't think they're that stupid, in most cases, that they have to do that.

Now, the other argument that is often made by the government, too, is that, well, you're taking it off a person's wage each month. Well, that's the highest priority. They might have other priorities. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that there's no higher priority than looking after your family. There's no higher priority. So the idea that some mortgage company or the guy that you bought the Corvette from or the gambling debt down at the corner are not going to get a chance at taking the money off because you, the government, are taking it off as a priority – tough titty, if you'll pardon the expression. That's the way that things should be run. That's the way it should be done. That's just too bad. And I spell it t-i-t-t-y, so don't get too concerned there; it's an old English saying.

So I don't see why we don't go the final step and strike it off right at the beginning from their salary. It's a good, simple way to do it. It brings stability back to the family. It'll pay off huge dividends in the future in cutting crime rates and family breakdown and so on. It's so logical, Mr. Speaker, that I guess that's what is really against it. It's so logical; it's so simple. It should have been done years ago. That's the only argument I can think of.

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

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise to speak to Bill 207. Before I start to get into the meat of my speech, I would like to spend a little bit of time to compliment the member for introducing this Bill. I think the Bill comes with the best of intentions in mind. Certainly my experience in the past few months as an elected representative is such that I have had experience dealing with both sides of this issue, and it's a very difficult issue to deal with. I have had mothers in my office who are in really desperate straits, and I really have attempted my very utmost to help them. I've also had fathers who have been in my office who have felt that they have tremendous problems. So there are two sides to every issue. I've had fathers in my office who have said: "Look; I only make X number of dollars a month, and I have a court order that I am supposed to pay everything that I make. What am I supposed to live on?"

5:00

I think the member has the best intentions in mind. I compliment her. I certainly appreciate the fact that she must have spent many, many hours preparing this Bill, the length of the Bill, the amount of detail that's involved in the Bill. Certainly I think she should be congratulated on the initiative in this Bill. Over time maybe we can resolve some of the situations that she is trying to address through this Bill, Mr. Speaker, but I must say that I don't think Bill 207 is the way to accomplish the objectives that the member has in mind.

I would just like to comment on a few areas of the Bill. I think the Member for Calgary-East went through some of the specifics, some of the detail. I won't get into quite as much detail, but I would like to maybe cover a few of the points that the member discussed as well as discuss a few points of my own. I think that when we pass legislation in this House, we need to think about the repercussions of that legislation. While I indicated that I felt that the member had spent a good deal of time and effort preparing this Bill, I'm not sure that she really thought about what the repercussions would be as a result of passing this Bill. Parts of this Bill, quite frankly, are redundant. I think we have already in place legislation that will accomplish much of what this Bill is asking for. In other areas I think the Bill would in fact create a lot of duplication and effort.

As I indicated earlier, I have been on both sides of the situation. Quite frankly, I have been indirectly involved, although not on the basis of someone coming to appeal to me as an MLA for help but through acquaintances that I have. I guess what surprises me most is that not all people are problem people. I think the basic assumption this Bill is written on is that we are going to have problems in virtually every case, and I think that's where the member has gone wrong. I think that is precisely where we will end up: in the bureaucratic nightmare that my colleague from Calgary-East referred to. Not only are we going to have to deal with, quite honestly, the many hundreds and thousands of cases where we are having problems collecting, but now to that we are going to add the burden to government, to all the regulatory authorities, to the collection authorities, to business of all the many, many cases where there are no collection problems. So we're going to be creating problems where there are none at this point in time.

There are people that this Bill would discriminate against, Mr. Speaker – the law-abiding citizens, the couples – and there are many of them. The Member for Redwater talked about the fact that these people couldn't get along in marriage so how do we expect them to get along after marriage. In some cases that's true, but in some cases there are people who have a very civil

relationship. The father acknowledges the fact that he's responsible for the children, and they get along just fine. So in that case there is no problem. The payments are made on a very regular basis, and there's no need to involve the many workings of government in that particular case. These are the people that we do not need to be addressing with this Bill.

Who we do need to address with this Bill – and those are the individuals that the Member for Calgary-East was addressing when he introduced his legislation in the last session – are the deadbeat dads of this world. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't like that term, but it suits some of these individuals, because there are deadbeat dads. I have dealt with mothers who have husbands, ex-husbands who are acting every bit like deadbeat dads, and I don't feel at all bad about calling them deadbeat dads. Those are the individuals that we have to look after.

On the other side of the coin, Mr. Speaker, I have also dealt with some of the so-called deadbeat dads who do have other issues. I certainly don't say that that excuses them from making their maintenance payments, but I think that sometimes the mothers are a little bit negligent in this situation too. I have had fathers that have called me, that have been in my office who are making their maintenance payments on a very regular basis, but along with the maintenance enforcement order, along with the court order on maintenance there was also supposed to be access to the children for the father. In some cases that access is not forthcoming.

I realize that that is not really part of this Bill, but I think that it goes to the point that we have to consider that there are two adults in every one of these situations, and then there are also some children. We have to consider not only the feelings of the mother, the father but also the children, and the fact that the mother will not allow access to the father I think is harmful not only to the father but to the well-being of the children as well. This Bill certainly does not address that. I am not saying that we have sufficiently addressed that with legislation that we have in place now. I'm not quite sure how we address that situation, Mr. Speaker, but I did want to bring that up. I have had some very distraught fathers call me and say: "Look; why am I being penalized here? I am making my payments as I am requested to do, and I have not had access to my children for six months and in fact sometimes as much as a year."

I also want to talk a little bit about some of the complicated process that the member has in this Bill. The member talks about all of the court orders that are required, and I want to point out to the members of this House that the program that is currently in place does not require additional court hearings. It only requires the stamp of the clerk of the Court of Queen's Bench. Now, that is streamlining and not creating complications where complications need not be created.

The Member for Calgary-East already mentioned – and I think it needs to be reiterated – that the program in place now has the legislative authority to fax continuing attachments to the employer. This is an instantaneous process and saves not only on postage costs but obviously on time. Where the employer does not have a facsimile machine, the attachment is served by a sheriff within five days.

Bill 207 would add bureaucracy to the system, and I have touched on that just briefly. The other area that I think we need to keep in mind is that we have the potential of creating a backlog in the court system, and everyone well knows that there already is a certain amount of backlog in the courts. Why would we want to bring something like this into the courts just to create additional

backlog when I've already mentioned that a good deal of the cases we would be dealing with are cases where there is virtually no problem?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry to interrupt the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, but members are reminded that this is indeed the Assembly. We want conversations to be at a sufficiently low level and for all hon. members to be sitting in their chairs and not in the chairs of other members.

Debate Continued

MR. RENNER: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm appalled that some members wouldn't be interested in what I have to say.

Mr. Speaker, I was referring to the court backlogs. I was talking about the fact that we don't want to clog up the courts, but there's something even more important about court backlogs. If we admit that backlog in the courts is a reality – and quite frankly that is the case – then we have to realize that in these particular cases where we are having some problem, where the mother is having a problem maintaining a proper and adequate standard of living for herself and her children, she's going to have to wait through that backlog in the courts before she gets a chance to have this court order to attach the deductions to the father's pay. So I think that the system we have right now, quite frankly, is a lot more efficient than that. The court order is made. If the payments are not forthcoming, she doesn't have to go to court. She contacts maintenance enforcement, and proceedings are put into place to start to collect the back payments.

5:10

I quite frankly agree with the Member for Calgary-East when he stated that we have one of the most advanced maintenance enforcement programs in the country, and with the changes that were made in the last session of the Legislature, we have even progressed further. We have a much stronger system. I think I can honestly say, Mr. Speaker, that my office has had far fewer problems, albeit not eliminated. I will admit that, hon. member. Not eliminated. I think that even the hon. member that's brought this Bill forward will have to admit that as a result of the legislation that was passed in this House, the problems that we have encountered have been far fewer, that the mothers who have had problems and have gone to maintenance enforcement have for the most part been successful.

There are always going to be exceptions, and quite frankly I don't think Bill 207 would solve those exceptions either, because anybody that wants badly enough to get around something is going to figure out a way to get around it. I'll give you a case in point. For example, I dealt with a father who was self-employed and supposedly had no income. So where is this going to come from? At the same time as he was self-employed and had no income, he was living reasonably well, it would seem. I and the mother couldn't quite figure out what it was that he was living on, but for all intents and purposes maintenance enforcement did not have something that they could take, and this Bill quite frankly would have nothing that it could offer either.

AN HON. MEMBER: You should have married her.

MR. SMITH: Do the honourable thing, Rob.

DR. OBERG: Come on; a good MLA would have.

MR. RENNER: There are some things that I do as an MLA, but that, hon. member, is not one of them.

Mr. Speaker, we also link our maintenance enforcement program with the registries. It not only goes so far as to disallow someone from renewing vehicle registrations or renewing driver's licences, but it also allows us to track addresses. That is one of the problems that people have. Some of these delinquent fathers start traveling all around the province and all around the country, and we lose track of them, and then we can't find them. As long as they maintain a driver's licence, then not only are we going to be able to withhold that driver's licence, but we're also going to be able to, as much as possible, update the address and keep the files current so that the maintenance enforcement files don't get out of date with all the various moves in place.

Mr. Speaker, I have had some of these fathers in my office who are very concerned that they aren't able to get a driver's licence, and quite frankly in most cases I have no sympathy for them. I tell them: you fulfill your obligations to your family, to your children, to your ex-wife, and you'll have no problem getting a driver's licence. It does work, and I can't think of a better way to attract someone's attention than to fail to renew a driver's licence.

MRS. SOETAERT: How often do you renew a licence?

MR. RENNER: The hon. member says, "How often do you renew a licence?" You only renew a licence every five years, but you renew your vehicle registration a lot more often than that, hon. member, and it's not restricted to driver's licences. It's vehicle registrations and driver's licences: anything to do with the registries. So it's much more than just driver's licence renewal.

I want to just point out that the record speaks for itself, Mr. Speaker. I do have some statistics here, and I think they're interesting statistics. In the 1993-94 fiscal year the program collected over \$72 million compared to just \$32 million for '93-94. As I said, the numbers speak for themselves. The program is being more successful. I am not going to stand here and say that the program is perfect, and I don't think any member in this House would say that the program is perfect, but I think an increase of in excess of a hundred percent in one year is probably a pretty good success rate.

Bill 207 proposes that the maintenance order shall not deduct more than 50 percent of net wages. Well, Mr. Speaker, the program we already have in place says that the program exempts the first \$525 plus 30 percent of net wages that exceeds the \$525 but that after that 100 percent of the remaining amount can be seized by the program. I think that is in many cases a better program, a stronger program than what the hon. member proposes in her Bill.

I guess the most important part of this Bill and something that all members of the House need to keep in mind is that this Bill does not respect the privacy or the wishes of individuals. There are many, many cases where a couple will be divorced, will agree. There is not a dispute involved. There is agreement. A very civil divorce proceeding takes place. The one person agrees. We're always talking about deadbeat dads in this whole area, but quite frankly I have dealt in a couple of cases where it is the mother who is paying maintenance to the father. Those are a little bit interesting too, Mr. Speaker, because we have deadbeat moms that are involved in this whole process. So we don't want to get completely tied up on deadbeat dads. I have dealt with a case where a young man is looking after four children, and his wife is supposed to be making the payments and is not doing so.

Mr. Speaker, I have some very interesting, challenging information in front of me here that I would like to get into, but in view of the hour I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member has moved that the Assembly do now adjourn debate. All those in favour of that motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain, the government Whip.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we now call it 5:30 and reconvene in Committee of Supply at 8 o'clock tonight.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. government Whip has moved that we call it 5:30 and that when we reassemble, we do so in Committee of Supply at 8 o'clock this evening. All those in favour of that motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]

