

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, October 11, 1995**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 95/10/11

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

head: Prayers

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The prayer we offer each day in our Legislature is part of a parliamentary tradition going back hundreds of years. The prayer that we use on this day is the prayer that Parliament has used at Westminster, our Mother of Parliaments, since the year 1659, and it is still used on occasion in Commonwealth parliamentary assemblies all over the globe.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we Thine unworthy servants here gathered together in Thy name do humbly beseech Thee to send down Thy heavenly wisdom from above to direct and guide us in all our considerations.

Amen.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members will note that there is a new person at the Table today. For all of you who have not yet met him, his name is Earl Evaniew. Earl is on a one-year secondment to Parliamentary Counsel from the law firm Emery Jamieson. He will be working with Rob Reynolds for the next year. As members may be aware, Frank Work has been seconded to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, thereby creating this vacancy.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members the newly appointed Canadian ambassador to Ukraine, Mr. Christopher Westdal. Mr. Westdal is visiting Alberta with respect to our interests in Ukraine prior to his departure for Ukraine. Alberta has a long-standing relationship with Ukraine and has been very involved in supporting Ukraine's independence of 1991. Alberta wishes to build long-term mutually beneficial relations with Ukraine based on economic ties. We believe there are opportunities for increased trade and investment. Given Alberta's interests, there is a lot that the ambassador can do on our behalf.

I would ask that Mr. Westdal rise in the Speaker's gallery and receive the recognition and warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table in the House a petition reading:

We the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to place a moratorium on any further reductions to the budget for health, and to immediately commence a process to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of health care services currently available.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition from 455 Edmontonians and from other parts of Alberta.

We the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to place a moratorium on any further reductions in the budget for health, and to immediately commence a process to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of health care services.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition as well signed by 374 people urging this government to place a moratorium on health cuts so that they can evaluate the quality and effectiveness of health care services that are presently available.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present today. One is on behalf of the Hon. Gary Mar, MLA for Calgary-Nose Creek, a petition of 187 names urging the government as follows:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly 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.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, has 120 names from my home riding, Calgary-North Hill, is the same petition, and says exactly the same thing.

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

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta from 239 Lesser Slave Lake constituents urging 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.

Thank you.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would beg your leave to present a petition signed by 400-odd Albertans. The petition urges the government to place a moratorium on health care cuts or cuts to the health care budget and, as well, to immediately institute a process to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of health care services for Albertans.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to submit a petition to the Legislature from 126 Albertans requesting that the Legislature delay and postpone the cuts in health care, education, and social services.

Thank you.

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

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition signed by 93 Calgarians urging the Legislative Assembly of Alberta 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: Notices of Motions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give you notice of a motion that I would like to have debated after question period under Standing Order 30. It is as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta adjourn the ordinary business of this House to discuss the urgent matter of the state of health care in the province of Alberta given the Premier's public admission that the government's health care reforms are plagued with mistakes.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I give notice of the following motion. I move that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, October 12, 1995, at the regular hour of 5:30, it shall stand adjourned until Tuesday, October 17, 1995, at 1:30 p.m.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 43

Willmore Wilderness Park Amendment Act, 1995

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Willmore Wilderness Park Amendment Act, 1995.

When this Bill has been passed, it will put into legislation the management practices that have been a matter of policy since the inception of this park.

[Leave granted; Bill 43 read a first time]

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

Bill 44

**International Trade and Investment
Agreements Implementation Act**

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being the International Trade and Investment Agreements Implementation Act.

This Bill will allow the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to be in concurrence with international trade agreements negotiated by the federal government.

[Leave granted; Bill 44 read a first time]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 44 as just read be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

1:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to table five copies of Alberta Education's annual report, the 90th edition. Additional copies can be obtained from my office.

Thank you.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table with the Assembly today a response to Motion for a Return 177 as

amended. It's also my pleasure today to table with the Legislative Assembly the following 1994 and '95 annual reports: Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council, and the Farmers' Advocate of Alberta. Copies of these reports can be obtained through my office.

MR. THURBER: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to file with the Assembly five copies of the Alberta Municipal Affairs 1994-95 annual report. It includes the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, ACCESS, and special areas. Members of the Assembly who wish copies of this could contact my office, and they can obtain them there.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table with the House the 22nd annual report, to March 31, 1995, of the department.

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

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the 1994-95 annual report for the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development.

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

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the '95 annual report of the Alberta Research Council. If members wish extra copies, they can contact me, and I'll see that they get them.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling today the Alberta Health annual report for 1994-95. Additionally, I'm tabling the Alberta health care insurance plan's statistical supplement for 1994-95, the Wild Rose Foundation annual report for the same period, and the Alberta College of Optometrists annual report for 1994.

As well, the audited financial statements for the year ended March 31, 1995, of the Alberta Cancer Board and of Alberta Hospitals Edmonton and Ponoka are submitted.

Also, I'm pleased to file the Capital health authority's very interesting report, A Year in Review, covering the period June 19, 1994, to June 19, 1995.

In addition, I wish to file with the Assembly a copy of a letter I have sent to the Minister of Health for Canada in response to her letter of January 6, 1995.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, in keeping with my colleagues' efforts for greater accountability across government, my colleagues and I are tabling today a number of reports in response to the recommendation from the Auditor General of timely disclosure, and virtually all of these reports were made public prior to September 30, 1995.

In keeping with that, Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling today volumes 1, 2, and 3 of the '94-95 public accounts, the quarterly report of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for the quarter ended March 31, 1995, the Alberta Securities Commission's annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1995, the annual report of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for the year ended March 31, 1995, the annual report of the Treasury Department for

the fiscal year ended March 31, 1995, the 57th annual report of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and a document that was filed with the people of Alberta in June, when we filed the financial statements, the first annual report of the government of Alberta regarding performance measurement, the Measuring Up document.

As well, there's some material that was filed with the people of Alberta on September 27 regarding the departmental annual reports and all of these having been tabled at that time, an indemnity agreement as of July 10, 1992, between the government and the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, the report of the audit committee pursuant to the Deficit Elimination Act, and finally the first-quarter update for the annual year of '95-96.

MR. DAY: To continue with open government and provision of information, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the annual Labour report, '94-95; the annual Labour report, '93-94; the Workers' Compensation Board annual report, '94; and the Alberta Labour Relations Board annual report, '93-94.

On behalf of the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism I'm happy to table the Alberta Economic Development and Tourism annual report, '94-95; the Alberta Opportunity Company annual report, '93-94; the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research annual report, '94-95; and the Alberta Tourism Education Council annual report, 1995.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 82 of the Electric Energy Marketing Act I wish to file five copies of the annual report of the Alberta Electric Energy Marketing Agency.

In addition, I would like to also, although this is not a legislative requirement, file five copies of the annual report of the Energy Resources Conservation Board.

As well, I'd like to file five copies of the sale agreements of our divestiture of the Lloydminster biprovincial upgrader.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 52 of the Legislative Assembly Act I wish to table five copies of the annual report for the Department of Energy for both 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Pursuant to section 22(3) of the Gas Resources Preservation Act, sections 17 and 18 of the Natural Gas Price Administration Act, sections 16, 17, and 20 of the Natural Gas Pricing Agreement Act, section 11 of the Petroleum Marketing Act, and section 3 of the Take-or-pay Costs Sharing Act, I wish to file five copies of the 1994 annual report of the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission.

Pursuant to section 18(2) of the Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority Act I wish to file five copies of the 1993-94 annual report of the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority.

DR. WEST: A few years ago I was challenged to get rid of paper in government, but it looks like I missed.

Mr. Speaker, I have six tablings and filings today: first, four copies of the Alberta Lotteries 1994-95 annual report.

Secondly, I'm filing the 71st annual report of the Alberta Liquor Control Board. This is a 15-month filing in order to bring it in line with the fiscal year of the government.

I would also like to table New Directions for Lotteries and Gaming, a report that was brought forward by Judy Gordon, the chair of the Lottery Review Committee.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order.

DR. WEST: My apologies. The MLA for Lacombe-Stettler.

I would also like to file – and this is not a requirement, but it is public – two requests for proposals from the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission for the outsourcing of the operation of VLTs as well as information technology services.

Finally, I'd like to table the '94-95 Alberta Transportation and Utilities annual report.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I thought the last speaker was into shedding people, not paper.

Pursuant to Standing Order 37(3) I'm pleased to table this afternoon the report from Synergy 2. This was a demonstration project by the Kerby Centre in my constituency that documents, I think, in an impactful and persuasive way health care needs both physical and mental of seniors in Calgary.

Thank you.

1:50

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

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the following documents: the 1993-94 annual report of the Children's Advocate, the 1994-95 annual report of the Children's Advocate, the 1994-95 Family and Social Services annual report, and also a copy of a response to questions 182 and 186.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to table five copies of the 1994-95 annual report for the Department of Justice.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to file today with the Assembly the '94-95 annual report of the Department of Environmental Protection, the '94-95 fiscal year annual report of the northern river basins study, the '94-95 annual report of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, the '94-95 annual report of the tire recycling board, the '95 annual report of the Alberta special waste corporation, and the '94-95 annual report of the Environment Council of Alberta. This, incidentally, is the 24th annual report.

As well, I am pleased to table today the response to Motion for a Return 174.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table a number of documents today. First of all, in response to Motion for a Return 159 I am tabling five copies of the summary document requested; secondly, five copies of Alberta Community Development's annual report for the year ended March 31, 1995; next, five copies of the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation annual report for the year ended March 31, 1995; and finally, five copies of the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues report for the year ended March 31, 1995.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vegreville-Viking.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to table with the Legislative Assembly the 1994-95 annual report of the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute. Further copies may be obtained from my office.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to file five copies of a Dialogue on Health report from 57 Albertans throughout northern Alberta, a questionnaire on health care. Interestingly enough, a line that catches me here from the top one is: health care is going to hell. That was a month ago. Since then it has gone.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table 51 copies of the responses to Dialogue on Health that were received from the Lethbridge area. They also indicate very much that the people in Lethbridge are concerned about the direction of health care changes.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of 123 responses to the Alberta Liberal Dialogue on Health collected in the Edmonton area that can best be summed up by the statement: eventually there will no longer be any form of quality health care in our province that the average person can afford.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce three very prominent people in the agricultural community. At this time I would like to introduce Pat Durnin, who is chairman of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association; Sharon McKinnon, policy manager for the Western Canadian Wheat Growers; and Wayne Kriz, the vice-president of the Western Barley Growers Association. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to the Assembly today the elected leader of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees here with us today in the Assembly. I'd ask Ms Carol Anne Dean if she would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged today to introduce to you and other members of the Legislature a group of seniors' advocates who are with us. They are Phylis Matousek, Grace Diederichs, Con Duemler, Louis and Ruth Adria, and Lynne Arling. They can speak from personal experiences regarding the health care cuts as well as on behalf of seniors throughout the province. I'd ask them to rise and be welcomed by the members.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 42 students from Satoo elementary school who are accompanied today by their teachers Mrs. Deborah MacDormand and Miss Marion Ramsey and parents Mrs. Arlene Zawadiuk, Mrs. Edna Bisson, Mrs. Karen Hilger, and Mrs. Debbie Sturko. I ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of bright, energetic, enthusiastic young Edmontonians who are not only interested in the political process but community minded as well, as they are contestants who are running for the prince and princess contest in conjunction with a gala harvest ball on November 10 sponsored by the Edmonton ridings of Roper, Glengarry, and Norwood. I'd ask them to please rise as I introduce them: Carolyn Brown, Jason and Kristina Bruno, Joe Chiazza, Michael and Robert Majeed, and Kenman and Kenton Gan. They are accompanied today by parents, community leaders, and sponsors consisting of Mollie Warring, Linda Brown, Sylvano Bruno, Dean Sanduga, and Yim Gan. I'd like them to please receive the warm welcome of Assembly.

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

MR. DECORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce special students from a school in my constituency. This is a program known as the Woodside program, which is part of the Edmonton public school system. Students are accompanied by Constable Brian Andersen, Sam Knault, Tim Loreman, Trudy Wilson, Mylan Dragicevic, and a lady who is often compelled to listen to her husband practice his questions for question period, Doreen Percy. Would they stand and be introduced.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to the members of this Assembly two individuals who are soon leaving our fair province to go work in an orphanage in Rwanda. They actually live in Calgary-Mountain

View. We certainly want to wish them Godspeed and protection. They are Thomas and Ruth Kuelker. They are in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you some other elected officials. They represent a total of 140,000 members. They are Audrey Cormack, president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, and Bauni Mackay, president of the Alberta Teachers' Association. She represents 4,500 members. Audrey Cormack represents 107,000 members. Carol Anne Dean, who was introduced just previously, represents 45,000 members. Elisabeth Ballermann, president of the Health Sciences Association, represents 7,500 members. Would they please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:00

They also have with them Gil McGowan, who is director of research and communication, Alberta Federation of Labour; Ed Mardell, executive secretary-treasurer of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees; and Linda Michaleski, secretary of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, on the Fightback campaign. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Last but definitely not least I'd like to also introduce a constituent of mine from the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. Her name is Hazel Stubbs.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege today to introduce two people whom I had the opportunity of having a delightful conversation with this morning on family issues and health care issues from the land down under, Australia. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you Dr. Denis Ladbrook, who is an associate professor of social work at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia, and Miss Heather Deighan, who is the director of a federally funded program in Western Australia called Caring in Communities. The function of this program is to develop human resources in rural health support in Western Australia. I would ask that you rise and receive the warm support of this Assembly.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, I stand with great privilege to introduce two ladies who are sitting in your gallery, the Speaker's gallery. I'd like to introduce Mrs. Mason and Mrs. Tannas. The reason I'm so privileged in introducing specifically Mrs. Mason is that she grew up in the same area of Scotland as my mother. I'd like to extend a warm welcome to the Legislature.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to present to you and Members of the Legislative Assembly a friend and constituent, Ron McClelland. Ron is the special projects director for Campus Crusade for Christ. He is probably Canada's best-known ambassador to Ukraine as he has gone to Ukraine 16

times, giving leadership to the trade unions. I had the privilege of spending 16 days in Ukraine with Ron in September. He is in the members gallery, and I ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member responsible for science and research.

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take the privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very important partner in drug research, manager of Western Canada Eli Lilly Canada. Seated in the members' gallery is Mr. Craig Waugh. I'd like you, Mr. Waugh, to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege this afternoon to introduce you to a group that's well worth waiting for. They are 38 students from the Notre Dame school in Leduc, enthusiastic and very special, as the members can see, as they sit in their gallery. The students are attended this afternoon by their two educators, Mrs. Theresa Doherty and Ms Anne Hewes. You'll notice that they have a large contingent of very dedicated parents that are showing strong support for their school and children as well. They are Mr. Frank Blenke, Mrs. Bev Comeau, Mr. Brad Symes, Mrs. Gloria Sullivan, Mr. Ken Irving, Mrs. Doris Jacobi, Mrs. Anne Filiatreault, Mrs. Diane Lagace, and Mrs. Sharleen Brownlee. I ask the Assembly to give them a warm welcome this afternoon.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Karen Harshnitz and Gaye Sydenham. Karen and Gaye are visiting us today from the association of physiotherapists in Alberta. I would ask them to rise - I understand they are present in the members' gallery - and be welcomed to this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Health Services Restructuring

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals stand unquestionably for a publicly funded, properly managed health care system. This government has created chaos in our health care system, and now the Premier says that he's going to fix in 90 days all those problems that he has created in the last 900. In 90 days will the Premier be able to tell us how his vision of a two-tiered Americanized health care system will be less expensive than Alberta's publicly funded health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, we're back to the same old question. I guess, Mr. Speaker, I'll have to give the same old answer. The only people talking about a two-tiered Americanized system are the Liberals. These are the people who seem to be possessed with

this notion. We're not talking about it at all. Only the Liberals are talking about it.

MR. MITCHELL: In 90 days will a woman with a lump in her breast still have to wait three weeks before she can get a biopsy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that question was just nonsensical. What we're trying to do . . . [interjections] It is.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, give me the example; give me the details. I will have that specific case investigated by the hon. Minister of Health. If there is a specific problem, there are processes to deal with those specific problems.

Mr. Speaker, what is fundamental to this question, the whole question of health, is first of all: why did it need fixing? It needed fixing because health care costs over the past 10 years have risen by over 200 percent. We had over 200 health jurisdictions in this province, 200 separate administrations. We now have 17. Health care providers – doctors, nurses, people who are involved in ancillary health care programs – all say that there is waste and duplication and abuse and overuse in the system, and it has to be changed. What we have done through the formation of a fifth standing policy committee is put in place a process where all of these stakeholders will have direct input – direct input – into the decision-making process.

MR. MITCHELL: In 90 days will there still be painful 18-month waits for hip and knee replacements?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, that is a reasonable question. Hopefully there won't be. Hopefully, as we go through the restructuring and we create efficiencies in the system and find new and better and more effective and more efficient ways of doing things, those people waiting for hip replacements will not have to wait as long.

MR. MITCHELL: In 90 days will people still have to wait three months before they are even assessed for home care?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as we go through the reformation of the system, as we find new efficiencies and better ways of doing things, maybe we'll find some improvements in the areas that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition just alluded to.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, hon. Premier, it's been an extended period since we last met, and maybe we've forgotten that if we're going to ask a question, we ought to listen to the answer. If we're going to answer questions, we ought to listen to the question.

Health Services Restructuring (continued)

MR. MITCHELL: In 90 days will everyone who needs physiotherapy to maintain their health have insured access, or will the elderly and the chronically ill still be denied this treatment?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about a focus on community care, and as we go through the restructuring and put together an effective and efficient system, then perhaps we can put

the savings, the dividends back into the kinds of programs the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition just alluded to.

2:10

MR. MITCHELL: In 90 days will Alberta's suicide rate still be amongst the highest in Canada because mentally ill Albertans simply have no place to go during a crisis?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what we're doing over the next 90 days and beyond – because this isn't a committee for just 90 days. This is a standing policy committee to address on an ongoing basis concerns related to health. What we want to do by the end of this year is communicate honestly and openly to the public of Alberta, first of all why we had to deal with the problem, how far we've come certainly in terms of administrative restructuring, where we are today, and what the vision for health care will be in the future, a true and honest picture allowing those people directly involved in providing health care services direct access to the political decision-making process.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm getting some interference. I don't know if it's coming from the direction of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, but it is interfering with my hearing. I wonder if we could proceed with the question period, where we listen to the questions and listen to the answers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Deputy Minister of Health

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a brochure advertising a health care conference that's going to be held in the city of Edmonton featuring as keynote speaker Dr. Jane Fulton, Alberta's Deputy Minister of Health. Now, Alberta Health managers have been told directly by the minister that they are not allowed to double-dip, yet the Minister of Health has negotiated a moonlighting clause for her new deputy, Jane Fulton. Would the minister please explain why this deputy minister is allowed to charge a fee for talking about her job responsibilities to audiences here in the province?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to enlighten the hon. member. First of all, Dr. Fulton was hired by the Department of Health on July 1 of 1995. Dr. Fulton had made some commitments in her professional capacity, and it was agreed that she could keep those professional commitments that she had made previous to joining the department and do that on her vacation time, not on our time.

Secondly, I would like to inform the hon. member and all hon. members . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have a rather serious allegation with serious implications, and it would be appropriate to listen to the minister give an explanation.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a serious allegation.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, at the conference that the hon. member is alluding to, the Deputy Minister of Health for Alberta will not be speaking in her capacity of Deputy Minister of Health for the province of Alberta, nor will she be reflecting her capacity in any of the speaking engagements that she took and committed to prior to her becoming the Deputy Minister of Health.

If the hon. member, after the conference, would like to raise an issue with me in fact rather than in innuendo about her talk at the conference, Mr. Speaker, I would prefer that he would bring that in fact to this Legislature rather than cast this type of aspersion in the Legislature. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I hear rumblings over there about a list. Perhaps the hon. member would like to ask that in his supplemental question.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I assume, Mr. Speaker, that the minister will table that so I won't have to ask for it, because that would be the right thing to do.

Now, will the Minister of Health please explain why she would allow her deputy . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: I'm prepared to answer. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, if you try and do a preamble on the supplementary, it sometimes can be interpreted as a question. Is that . . .

MR. SAPERS: No, Mr. Speaker. I'll continue with my question.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would be very pleased to table with the Assembly the list of commitments that Dr. Fulton had in advance of her becoming the Deputy Minister of Health and the commitments that she has agreed to keep in that capacity.

MR. SAPERS: Regardless, Mr. Speaker, of any previous commitment or moonlighting clause that the minister might have inserted, would the minister please explain why she is allowing her deputy minister to moonlight and collect fees from pharmaceutical companies like Ortho Biotech to talk about policy issues in which those companies have a direct vested interest? Or don't you care about conflict of interest?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, I would repeat that if the hon. member would like to attend some of the conferences or lectures that Dr. Fulton has committed to and if he would bring fact to the attention of the minister and if there is any discussion or any part of Dr. Fulton's lecture that is inappropriate as regards her duties as deputy minister, I would be very pleased to respond. In the meantime I do take exception to this type of aspersion being cast on a deputy minister who is held in very high regard in Canada in health policy.

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

Health Services Restructuring (continued)

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Although there are many Albertans concerned about the future of health care in this province and our ability to maintain the present system, for my constituents it is one of the issues presently on their minds, and I'm sure that they'd like to know what we are presently going to do. Since you have just announced the formation of a new SPC on health restructuring, Mr. Premier, how do you see this committee working to ensure that access to quality affordable health care services is maintained as compared to 20 years ago, when I had to wait for two years for open-heart surgery?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess this follows on the line of questioning of the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, but the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake is certainly much more reasonable in her line of questioning. And I didn't even know that question was coming to me, and that's the truth. The hon. member caught me completely by surprise.

Mr. Speaker, what we're saying and what Albertans have told us – first of all, 68 percent of all Albertans have said that they like what we're doing, as opposed to the 24 percent of Albertans who are not sure if they even like what the Liberals are doing and the 42 percent who don't even know who the Liberal leader is. Anyway, Albertans have said that, yes, health is an issue and that it should be treated differently, and perhaps it should be. Unlike every other issue that we have to deal with – and we deal with issues that virtually affect all aspects of humanity and life – health is something that affects us all. It affects us all. We have said that we have to put in place a process that will allow health care providers and just normal Albertans the opportunity to provide their input directly to a political body and to bring about effective and efficient restructuring of the health care system. That's what it's all about.

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

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: could you, then, expand on how health care will be treated differently when it comes to government policy formulation as compared to what we have presently available?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, the only thing different is that there will be a fifth standing policy committee, because Albertans have said that health is something that affects us all. It will take some of the pressure off some of the other standing policy committees, but it will operate just as the other standing policy committees now operate.

By the way, that has proven to be one of the most successful political – well, it's no longer an experiment now – achievements in Canada. No other provincial jurisdiction has in place standing policy committees that allow people, people from all walks of life, direct access to the decision-making process.

2:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Then what kind of relationship will there be between the committee and the stake holders under this new structure in terms of cost-effective delivery and regulatory development?

MR. KLEIN: Quite simply, as I explained in answer to a question from the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, everyone involved in health care – all of the doctors I've talked to, certain people, patients, other health care providers – have said: "Yes, there is; there's waste in the system. We can achieve efficiencies, and we can do things differently." It's simply a matter of pulling all these forces together and having a cohesive body to hear those concerns, and that will be the function of the standing policy committee, to really provide the access to all of these groups, to seek their advice as to how they wish to work with us to bring about that effective restructuring.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most recent public accounts highlight the mess in our health care system as they show that there's no common standard or comparability in financial reporting across health care boards. You can't plan if you don't have the numbers, and next year is too late. Our health care system is balkanized. It's broke, and this minister's response is to set up another committee. I swear I saw a bumper sticker that said: honk if you're on one of Shirley's committees. There are that many committees. My questions are to the Minister of Health. How could a minister target almost \$750 million in health care cuts over three years without a plan or any vision of our health care system? I defy you to tell the physicians, nurses, and people who can't get access to our health care system that you know what it's going to look like a year from now or two years from now.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, yes, I'll answer the challenge, and the hon. member might have an answer too if he read the Alberta Health business plan, which is updated on an annual basis.

Secondly, I heard a comment from the hon. member about too many committees. Last session I understood that nobody had any input. I guess you can't have it both ways. Maybe he would like to table a list of committees in this Legislature. He may know of some that I don't.

Mr. Speaker, the reductions in health that were estimated to occur over the three-year plan were made with very good information, such as the information on the number of acute care beds per 1,000 that were required to meet the needs. I should mention to the hon. member that last year there were about 400,000 people admitted to hospital in this province and about 300,000 people who received services on a day basis. That has increased significantly over a period of time. The quality of care, the quality of life, the return to productivity occurs there. We are now finding that we do not have to institutionalize elderly people, that they can stay healthy and independent in their own homes of their own choice by increases in community care, and I would remind the hon. member that we have increased home care spending 300 percent over the last five years. We've put an additional \$110 million, reallocated from acute care, into home care over a three-year period.

Mr. Speaker, the plan is laid out. I think it's unfortunate that the hon. members don't read it, don't provide constructive input to the minister. I can tell you that the lack of constructive input from across the way is absolutely phenomenal.

DR. PERCY: Committee gridlock isn't a substitute for planning, Mr. Speaker.

Again my question is to the Minister of Health. Will the minister stop further cuts in health care funding for the coming year so that regional health boards can focus on delivering health care services rather than having to cope with yet another \$124 million in cuts?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member in his preamble to his question referred to planning. I would refer him

to The Rainbow Report. I would refer him to the Starting Points document. I would refer him to the Alberta Health plan.

In answer to what I believe was the question in all of that nonsense – will I refer to the regional health authorities? – I meet with the regional health authorities on a regular basis. They have a council of chairs. Mr. Speaker, I will be meeting with the regional health authorities next week. At that time they'll bring me the six-month update on activities.

Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the hon. member that last year when regional health authorities told this government and this minister that they were facing pressures in transition, we did respond and we did give \$40 million, one-time funding, to ease that transition. I think that clearly this government listens and it acts on what it hears.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Well, it's a simple question to the minister. Can you tell this Assembly how you can come up with a plan in 90 days – there's only 70 days now – to fix the system when it took you two and a half years to break it?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would take great exception to the fact that the system is broken. We had a survey of Albertans – not a poll, a survey, a benchmark survey. Four thousand people responded, a large sampling, the largest, I think, that has been done. One of the questions that was asked was: have you accessed or tried to access the health system in the last 12 months? It was a bit of a surprise to me that almost 75 percent said yes. Upon reflection I thought probably that's not an unusual number. The more important question was: did you experience problems in that access? Ninety-two point five percent said no.

Mr. Speaker, I do not agree that the system is broken. Restructuring a health system the size of ours with the complexity of it requires time and it requires co-operation. I would continue to invite the hon. members across the way to work with us on this system that is most important of anything to Albertans. Ministers of health across Canada can come together and set aside their political differences and deal with the issue of health. I invite the hon. members across the way to work with us to ensure that we have the best health system that provides the best service and that is sustainable.

I believe the Premier may want to supplement my answer.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I supplement only to raise the question as to whether the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is on the same wave length as his leader. I go back to August 15, a radio show, Dave Rutherford. On August 15, less than two months ago, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was talking first of all about the great business climate in Alberta. The host said: well, there should be traffic jams of semis out there coming to Alberta.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

MR. KLEIN: And Mr. Mitchell said: well, David, I think one of the reasons business comes to Alberta is probably the tax regime – that's right, although they wanted to tear it down – and also they come to Alberta because this is a wonderful place to live; it's got excellent health care; it's got excellent education; it's got a

great environment. Two months ago, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Liberal Opposition was saying that it's great. Today his friend two doors down is saying that it's awful. Now, which one is right?

Speaker's Ruling Supplementary Responses

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, there's a certain amount of leeway that goes with a supplemental answer to a question, and I fear that one strayed a little beyond the actual question.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

2:30 Grain Marketing

MR. HIERATH: Mr. Speaker, grain producers and producer organizations such as the Western Barley Growers Association and the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association have made it very clear that they want an opportunity to voice their opinion regarding grain marketing. Members of this Assembly on February 28 of this year unanimously agreed to Motion 501. Would the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development please advise this Assembly what is happening with regards to the plebiscite?

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to, first of all, commend the hon. Member for Taber-Warner for his diligent pursuit of this very important and critical matter to the agricultural community. As a result of the motion that was passed unanimously in this House and as a result of roundtable discussions that transpired through the past two years, where we have gone out and discussed with the grassroots agricultural community what it is that they would want as far as grain marketing is concerned, a committee was struck to indeed develop a process that would allow the Alberta producers a process to indicate what it is they would want as far as market development is concerned in the sale of wheat and barley. As it stands today, they are limited. They are allowed to market wheat and barley only to one agency, and that's the Canadian Wheat Board.

As a result of that, 10 farm leaders representing 10 major farm organizations in the province were asked to come together and organize a process that will allow for the plebiscite to come forward. The group has met, and the group has now come forward with recommendations that indeed will allow for a plebiscite on both wheat and barley starting November 14 to November 24.

Anyone who has produced wheat or barley or has an interest in that production and sale will be allowed to vote. They will be allowed to vote either by mail-in ballot or through any agricultural office in the province of Alberta. The department will be acting as a facilitator. The grass roots are the people that will be making this decision. They are the ones that produce the product. They are the ones that are marketing this product, and therefore they should be the ones that ultimately decide the fate of how that product is marketed.

MR. HIERATH: Concerns have been expressed that this plebiscite is a vote against the Canadian Wheat Board. Can the minister tell us what the intent of this plebiscite is?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This plebiscite will simply be an indicator to the federal government, under whom this legislation is structured, to indicate to them the feelings of the Alberta producers as to how they would want to market their product. I think it's important to recognize that indeed you are only allowed to market wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board. We are a province that's trying to enhance value added within this province. In order to produce very identity-specific types of products that you can move to a processor that needs a very specific type of product – that's not there today; that's not achievable. Therefore we don't allow for the processors to fully utilize the benefits of the excellent producers and the excellent production that we have in the province today.

All we're asking is to establish a complementary marketing system to the Canadian Wheat Board. We're not suggesting: do away with the Wheat Board. We're suggesting that for those that want to market through the Wheat Board, fine, you can still use that process. However, if you want to be entrepreneurial and if you can establish a specific market for that product, you are allowed to do so.

MR. HIERATH: Will the minister please advise us why his department is not sponsoring any information meetings for farmers during the discussion regarding the vote?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's important to note that this is a grassroots issue. The grass roots are the producers of this province. They are the ones that are restricted in their market abilities now. They are the ones that say: no, if it's barley or wheat, you can only market it to one agency. Canola, one of our most successful products and commodities in growth, is marketed through various agencies. There are options available. Indeed that's what the producers of Alberta asked for at the roundtables. It was asked for by unanimous consent of this Legislature, and we are allowing that to happen.

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

Seniors' Health Care

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors represent 92 percent of the province's long-term care facility residents and 42 percent of acute care, so the government's slashing of funding for all health care strikes at our most vulnerable seniors. This government has increased the amount paid by seniors in extended care and nursing homes, increased prescription drug costs by 50 percent, slashed extended health benefits, levied health care premiums, and erected barriers to mobility between RHAs. Seniors are terrified when they're sick, and they're afraid of getting sick. They now face the prospect of being shipped off for care, away from family and friends, because of barriers between our RHAs. It's not a good prescription. My questions are to the Minister of Health. I'd like to ask the minister: why has the minister increased health user fees and taxes for seniors while at the same time restricting access and services? This is less for more or short-term pain for long-term pain.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's preamble covered a lot of items, some of which were accurate, probably, and some which I hope are not. First of all, I would want to tell

her that there is no intention or desire to decrease or inhibit mobility between regions. In fact, we've been extremely flexible with seniors insofar as the resources are available where people who may live in one part of Alberta wish to move to another part to be close to family members. We've been as absolutely accommodating as we can in that.

Mr. Speaker, in some cases in transition elderly people or others in fact, because not only elderly people are in continuing care, have had to be placed outside of their immediate community, and always the opportunity is there for them to return to their community immediately a space becomes available.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, I know, would have read very carefully the report card from the Capital health authority, I think an extremely useful document, a very good document for informing people of how changes have occurred. I think that she would have seen in that document where there is a significant reduction in waiting time for continuing care and that the regional health authority is attempting to address that. As much as we can, we will ensure that people can have care close to their communities.

The issue of fees for long-term care: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta it is indexed to a person's income. I can point the hon. member to other provinces, some that may have Liberal leadership, where indeed the continuing care costs are much in excess of people's incomes.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of premiums was raised. Yes, some seniors pay premiums. Over 50 percent do not. Seniors told us in the roundtable discussions that they wanted to contribute where they could but that they wanted to ensure that the most vulnerable were protected. In Alberta they are protected.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, one only wishes it were really working. I beg the minister to listen and pay attention to what's happening out there.

Will the minister please table the plan that is in place or that one would hope is in place to increase all citizen access between RHAs? There is no plan that we know of.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there is not a need for a plan for increased access between RHAs because there is no barrier to access between RHAs. There is full mobility for people and for providers. That is a basic tenet of that.

2:40

What I would be pleased to give the hon. member, because I know that she has a very genuine interest in seniors' programs, is an outline of programs that we provide for seniors in Alberta as opposed to what are provided across Canada. I think that is important, because the hon. members across the way want universality and portability of health services. They would quickly understand that Alberta seniors gain a very distinct advantage living in Alberta. In physiotherapy, for example, there are four provinces in Canada that offer no access, none. Many provinces do not have allied health services in any way for their seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I will say this. The hon. member has been most proactive in bringing issues and items of seniors' concerns to my attention. I can assure her that we are working on development of a cumulative impact on programs, and when that information is completely assembled, we will be looking at the effects of these programs to ensure that Alberta seniors still receive the services that are most important to them, that will keep them well and

independent as long as they can in their own homes, and that there will be continuing care for them when they need it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm more interested in the reality of what's happening than the comparisons.

Will the minister, then, please make public the personnel requirement and the justification for allowing the kind of deterioration in ratios; for instance, allowing one RN to be on duty for over 400 senior citizens in care, 1 to 400? What's the justification?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, long-term care is the one area where we do have a minimum requirement for RN hours. That has been in place for a number of years in this province. It is recognized that not each individual requires RN care. What we have said in this province and I think what is most important is that no person will deliver a service in health that is not properly trained or qualified to do so. If the hon. member has a case in point where a continuing care institution is not providing the care, is not providing the minimum required nursing hours, if she will drop me a memo, as she is wont to do, I will investigate that specific item immediately.

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

Disaster Assistance

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On June 9 the South Saskatchewan River overflowed its banks through Medicine Hat. Rising waters caused overland flooding and sewer backup damage to neighbourhoods throughout the city, inflicting serious damage to both public and private property. Our city experienced firsthand the welcome assistance of Alberta Disaster Services. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Can the minister advise why it is that most individuals and businesses received their disaster assistance cheques long ago, yet some have still not arrived?

DR. WEST: In any disaster we look at the critical priorities first. There were people in Medicine Hat, for example, that were completely without a home. Some had their businesses a hundred percent destroyed. So those emergency claims are dealt with first. Then, of course, there's a long process in small business claims and in personal property losses to determine the actual loss and of course to follow up to see if it indeed was a small business that was eligible. It does take longer in small businesses to process those claims and, of course, the massive number of claims. There were close to 3,000; I believe there were 2,903 claims that we received. We've completed about 1,116, but we had to throw out about 494 before we even started because they weren't eligible under the federal/provincial program.

So, yes, there are some that took longer, but in Medicine Hat – and I'm sure the member would be interested in these notes – we had 587 claims, and we've settled 435 of them. Some of the rest weren't eligible. So I think we're pretty well coming down to the last claims that we have.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. With substantial damage sustained in Medicine Hat, why was it that the processing centre was set up in Lethbridge when the city of Lethbridge received relatively little property damage?

DR. WEST: It's always difficult in a disaster that was so wide ranging to know where to set up your command centre. We usually had done it through Edmonton in years before. So we went into the region and set up in Lethbridge because it was the centre. I just said that there were 587 claims in Medicine Hat, but there were 2,900 claims altogether. If you go out to Pincher Creek and those areas and start putting up a centre, Medicine Hat would have been out of sync with those. So it was the centre of the activities. Maybe in the future we could look at putting a command centre in some of those other areas like Medicine Hat, but let's hope it never happens again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, final supplemental.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental: why does the program only cover losses sustained to an individual's principal residence or small business that is a primary source of income? Why is a loss for one not the same as a loss for another?

DR. WEST: This was probably the most contentious part of this disaster and others. This is not an insurance program. I'll just start off by answering it that way. It's not an insurance program, and it doesn't cover insurable losses. If you can get insurance, then you have to go to that source.

It also had stipulations set out. It's a federal agreement. They pay 90 cents on the dollar on most of this disaster. They set out specifically what they will cover and what they won't cover. The small business has to be your prime source of income. If you have a rental house, let's say, and you have another job and you just happened to invest some money in a rental house to make some extra money, but it isn't your prime source of income, then if you're not covered by the insurance, this program will not cover you. Whereas if you have a small business and it is determined that that is your prime source of income, we cover up to \$100,000 in losses.

Another issue that came up along the same line was that we specify. We don't cover recreational vehicles. If you had a snow machine and it was washed down the river, we don't cover that. We can't cover those things, just the necessities of life, and it's spelled out by the federal program. If we go out of sync with the federal program, we'll be paying 100 percent of the cost.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Regional Health Authorities

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in the Alberta Liberal caucus booklet *Health Care We Can Trust*, the leader of this opposition said that health care starts with open and comprehensive consultation with the public. By contrast the Minister of Health this summer, in August I believe, had a top secret meeting with regional health authorities. After swearing them to secrecy, she explored a program that would see health care funding in Fort McMurray cut by 20 percent additionally and in Slave Lake by an additional 17 percent. [interjections] I thank my colleagues for

recognizing my ability to ferret out this secret report. My question, then, to the Minister of Health is: would she now in retrospect agree that keeping this report secret was the wrong thing for the government to do?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry; I have to disappoint the hon. member. There is no secret report. In fact, what did occur – and I'd like the hon. member to listen carefully because he really should understand this. I have had a group working to look at how we fund regions in the future – that is no secret; that has been out – co-chaired by Ric Forrest and Dr. Clarence Guenter. They've been working for a period of time. They did some preliminary work on a methodology of funding regions.

Now, contrary to what the hon. member might do, I thought it would be rather important to sit down with the regional health authorities in a meeting and say, "If we were to go to this type of funding, what would you see as the positives and the negatives to you?" What I did ask them to do was not to take the numbers that were associated and put those out, because they were very soft numbers. They were what would show trends rather than the actual fact. That was the only part I suggested. And true enough, you know, give that kind of information into the wrong hands, and you get all of this fear mongering: "This is a fact. It's going to happen. My goodness, we've lost \$6 million or \$8 million or \$2 million."

Instead what really happened, Mr. Speaker, was that by having that meeting with these regional health authorities and their chief executive officers or financial officers – very capable people – we were given the information that required us to ask that committee to go back and do some further work on some indices that would ensure that all regions were funded fairly, equitably, and adequately, which is important.

So, Mr. Speaker, that report is not concluded. I will assure the hon. member, I will commit today that when it is, I will share it with him and all members certainly. I'll call him personally when it's completed. It was no secret report. It was an interim report, where I sat down with the regions, gathered very good information, and, as you know now, hon. member, there is more work being done on the funding formula to ensure it meets the needs of the regions.

2:50

MR. GERMAIN: Well, if it is not a secret report, then will the minister table that report now in whatever state of completion it's in right here in this Legislative Assembly?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I could contemplate doing that, but as I said in my earlier response, incomplete information in the wrong hands could be very dangerous. And this is very incomplete information. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's been an exciting question period. I wonder if we could let the minister answer the question from the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. HENRY: Let's let her go to her office and get the report.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre, please.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as I say, there isn't a report to release. There is some preliminary work done by a committee. I'm sure the hon. member, if he were interested, might want to

call the chairs of the committee, ask them how they're making out with progress. I have given him the information today that's there, that suggested there was a type of funding. I think the report is in the right hands. It's been shared with the regional health authorities, who will directly be affected by the funding formula when it is adopted.

MR. GERMAIN: How troubling it is, Mr. Speaker, that the minister feels that MLAs' hands are the wrong hands.

Since you won't release the secret report, Madam Minister, will you now stand up in the House and assure the representatives of this Assembly from the northern Alberta areas around Fort McMurray and the northern Alberta areas around Slave Lake that they will not have 20 percent and 17 percent cuts and that in fact those areas who have now been cut more than the Premier's own statement have reached the end of their cuts?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I could probably go even a bit further with some information for the hon. member and inform him that I also met with all of the northern regional health authorities, independent of the other groups, to better understand the needs that they have in that area. I think it's important that we all recognize that just a blanket, one size fits all, doesn't work in Alberta. The northern communities have sparsity; they have distance; they have aboriginal communities; they have a number of items that are not common in all parts of the province.

So if the hon. member will just reflect on the fact that the funding formula committee is working at devising a funding formula to fund regional health authorities in a way that is fair and equitable and adequate and that the interests of northern Alberta are being looked after very well by their regional health authorities – and if he would bother to visit with his regional health authority, he would know the full content of both those meetings.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Question period is now over. I believe we have a couple of points of order.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Point of Order

Brevity in Question Period

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the third or fourth question today the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake asked what was obviously a preplanned question. There is nothing inherently wrong with that. Her question was on a subject that's important to her residents: health care. Unfortunately, the Premier took that opportunity to make his planned program speech to attempt to convince Albertans that health care is not in chaos. In doing that, it raises a point of order under *Beauchesne* 410, in that the Premier deviated from the rules of decorum here by not reminding himself that question period answers are intended to be short answers.

The government tabled earlier all kinds of written documentation indicating that they were open and wanted to give information to Albertans, but they make a mockery of those tablings when what they in fact do is plan to exhaust question period so that good questions on both sides of this Legislative Assembly do not get answered because the Premier takes the opportunity to make a planned speech.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a little early in the session for this kind of staged reaction from the member opposite. Usually

that happens as members get worn down by all the silliness that goes on in this House.

The statistics that are gathered on a regular basis on sessions show that clearly the members of the opposition have not just the most questions but take the most time with their questions. I have no problem at all with any member reminding all of us, "Let's try and be succinct; let's try and get to the point on questions and answers." But I don't think we should entertain any kind of thought or premise that there's a shortage of time at all for opposition questions. They have the most number of questions, and statistically they certainly take the most amount of time.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair would observe that if you're going to read *Beauchesne* 410, there are some other parts that also would be instructive that the Chair had reason to reflect upon on a number of occasions this afternoon. *Beauchesne* 410(4) comes to mind, where we're talking about "decorum is of importance," and that reflects on all sides of the House. Brevity in questions and answers of course is of great importance, "preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions require no preambles," and answers should be brief.

We think these are to be observed, but one could also reflect upon the fact that there have been some days since the 48th day of sitting of this Assembly, and during that time a number of questions have arisen, and people were anxious to ask those questions. Equally so, members of the government ministries were able to gather a lot of fact, and they were anxious to give all of their answers seemingly in one question at a time. So I think that both sides could take note from the point brought by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

We had another point of order. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Point of Order

Brevity in Question Period

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your comments to us at this point are clear from the perspective of the point of order that was raised by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray and had significant bearing on the point of order that I was raising on the question put to the Minister of Health by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I rose and do rise under *Beauchesne* 417, recalling, as the Speaker has, that answers to questions should be brief.

Mr. Speaker, there is one other element to this that the Speaker has not touched on. I do not find in *Beauchesne* any reference to the fact that a minister who takes the opportunity, as the rules allow, to answer a question, notwithstanding that the minister has the opportunity to refuse to answer that question, can then pass off the question, once answered, to another minister or indeed, in this case, the Premier, to continue answering the same question, although the answer, as the Speaker recognized and did admonish the speaker for, had little relevance to the question and was only to give the Minister of Health the opportunity to pass the ball to the Premier so that he could continue on with his diatribe and grab onto his press releases, as I say, having nothing to do with answering the question.

I think we need some direction from the Speaker as to whether or not ministers, once they've answered the question, unless it's substantive to go to another minister, have the ability to pass off and to then allow that minister or the Premier to continue on without being called upon by the Speaker.

Thank you, sir.

3:00

MS LEIBOVICI: If I may just supplement the point of order by the hon. member. I'd like to bring it respectfully to the Speaker's attention that this issue has been brought up in the past in the last session and is not, as the hon. House leader indicates, a new issue. This is an issue that the opposition has continually had to deal with since 1993.

In the issue of the Minister of Health and the Premier elongating their questions so that the opposition does not have ample opportunity to get their questions into play, I think that this is especially disturbing, given the intensity of the issue at hand within the province at this point in time. Again, I just respectfully would like to bring this to the Speaker's attention and that this issue has been brought up before. It has obviously not been resolved. All that the Speaker needs to do is to take his watch and take the minute hand and the second hand, and he'll know how long a question is over what I believe and I'm sure the Speaker would agree to believe to be appropriate.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Well, the Member for Sherwood Park lost me early on in his wanderings, but it did appear that what was bothering him was the fact that one member would stand up and give some kind of a speech and sit down, and then another minister would pick it up. Well, if you're going to rule that out of order – which is certainly for you to do, Mr. Speaker; we look forward to your ruling on that – I would also rule out the little display that we just saw, because he no sooner sat down than he passed the ball to the much more capable Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. So he's railing against the very activity which he just demonstrated here.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, first of all, the Chair has no great capacity to interpret the motives of hon. members who may be answering or may be asking a question, so that part of the point of order will not be addressed.

The Chair through the ages past has always allowed supplementary answers when they are succinct and relevant. The issue, of course, is we don't always know whether they're going to be succinct or whether they're going to be relevant, and that isn't always the easiest thing. As hon. members know, very often hon. members are given to asking a member of the government, of the legislative council, a question that isn't within the purview of that particular minister – and I refer of course to the Premier – who then often has to ask supplements. We sometimes have questions asked that really fall into one or two or three or four departments, so the issue of allowing a supplemental answer has always been permitted.

As I indicated, the Chair doesn't know what information will be disseminated, so until it's given, all hon. members are reminded that the overriding purpose is to seek information from the government and for the government to give information and as much as possible. If we could keep within those parameters, it would be helpful. To the extent that the Chair might be reminded by the occasion of the first full question period experience of its present occupant, maybe a tighter rein may be used once the Chair is aware of the horses that are being driven.

Are there any further points of order? If there are no further points of order, then we have a Standing Order 30 to consider. So we would call on the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

head: Request for Emergency Debate

Health Care System

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I'm asking Members of the Legislative Assembly to allow us to adjourn the ordinary business of the House today to discuss the urgent matter of the state of health care in the province of Alberta.

I'd like to tell the members of the Legislature a bit of an anecdote. Last week several of my caucus colleagues and I had the significant pleasure of meeting with a number of doctors from Edmonton in the first of several workshops which we are undertaking with health care professionals to assess the state of health care in this province and to determine ideas. At one point during the discussion at that workshop the doctors said unanimously that we must describe what has happened to this health care system as a result of what this government has done to it as chaos. They went on to say, "Please use the word 'chaos' to describe what's happened to the health care system," because that is what they see every day, and that's the kind of context within which they are trying to deliver health care to the people of this province.

They went on to say that irreparable damage is being done to this health care system every day. Case after case they have identified. Not all that long ago in Calgary I was talking to health care professionals who made a point in that regard. They said: take, for example, the spinal cord injury centre in Calgary, which is now being dismantled. That has taken over a decade to create. It is now being dismantled, and it will take decades to create again, if ever it is created once again.

Mr. Speaker, if ever we needed to know that there was a crisis in health care in this province, we have found it in the actions of the Premier himself. Just 21 days ago he made a public statement that health care was in such disarray – he could have used the word "chaos" – that he himself had to personally take over that portfolio and solve the problem. He set the guideline as 90 days. He should – and he didn't mention this – be aware that as bad as health care problems are today, this government's announced cuts are only about 45 percent implemented. If they are bad today, if chaos is the word that can be used to describe health care today in this province, I can only imagine or perhaps we can't even imagine what it's going to be like nine months, a year, a year and a half from now, when the bulk of the cuts have been implemented and have taken effect.

Do Albertans know that there is a crisis and a problem? Yes. Consistently 70 percent of Albertans have been telling this government and have been making it very clear in polling and surveys that they are very concerned about the health care system.

What is the nature of the urgency? Take, for example, physiotherapy. There are now 17 different physiotherapy systems in this province. A structure for prioritizing physiotherapy clients has been developed in such a way that the chronically ill and the elderly are not high on the list of priorities, and most of them are not eligible for public funding for physiotherapy services. Nine dollars is what a physiotherapist receives in one regional health authority for a visit; \$28 is what a physiotherapist receives in another health care facility for a visit. Mr. Speaker, there is a wide range, wide disparity amongst health care regions in this province on physiotherapy alone.

3:10

Home care. There are reductions being implemented across this province in various places in home care funding, despite the fact that the government has said that a central core value of its

health care restructuring was to increase that funding, increase that service to take the pressure off acute care facilities.

Last year 37 doctors left this province. This year, in a three-month period, the only report we have received, 124 doctors have left this province. In Calgary five neurosurgeons of 11 have left the province, Mr. Speaker. I can go on. Ambulance services are spotty, inconsistent, extremely expensive, and limit the access of some people without money to that kind of service.

Regional health authorities. They are unelected; there is no accountability. They spend 25 percent of the entire provincial budget. Mr. Speaker, they come in with financial statements now that are unaudited; \$22.5 billion of expenditures, and over 60 percent of the regional health authorities have unaudited financial statements. There is uneven funding. The WestView regional health authority gets \$300 per capita. The Chinook regional health authority gets \$936 per capita. It just so happens that the latter is in the minister's own constituency. One million dollars has been taken out of the Canmore hospital at the same time that the Premier is building a \$4 million overpass for one of his closest political associates and probably personal friends.

The 90-day program isn't working. It does not alleviate the urgency. All we have seen is yet another committee with yet another group of Conservative Members of the Legislative Assembly receiving even more money. We are not encouraged, Mr. Speaker. We have 69 days left to see the Premier solve these problems. His days are numbered. He needs some help. We've got to debate it this afternoon to help him along his way.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Health, before you commence, as I was trying to indicate to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, we're not debating the issue now; we're only talking about the urgency. If we move ahead, then we have the debate. So keep that in mind.

On the urgency, hon. Minister of Health.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I do want to speak against the urgency for the debate this afternoon, certainly not against the importance of the subject of health care restructuring. It is one of the most important activities that this government and 10 other governments in Canada are undertaking. I believe that if the hon. members opposite would become more knowledgeable about what is occurring in other provinces, they would understand that health restructuring is occurring everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, in the most desirable state, I guess, of affairs, we would shut the system down and turn it on in a restructured form. You can't do that in health. It's needed 24 hours a days, and it is being provided 24 hours a day. I think there is some evidence that restructuring is working. I think that the Capital health authority – and we'll deal with Edmonton; we're in that city now, and many of the hon. members are from that area – have proven in their report, which I think was an important document, that areas are improving and that there are areas that require more improvement. I think that was a very good document that shows what can happen through restructuring. It can show that waiting lists can come down. As I said earlier, the waiting list for long-term care in this city has dropped from 407 in June of 1993 to 288. I think that's admirable. I think it needs to improve even further, but I believe it's admirable.

The other one that's really important is the number of people waiting in acute care, not the best place to be receiving long-term care. Those numbers have dropped from 218 two years ago to 87 today. I think the restructuring in health is working. It's working

in this city, given a chance. I am sorry that the hon. members have chosen not to get involved in a positive way and be a part of building a health system, Mr. Speaker, that will be here for the future.

Mr. Speaker, I speak again to why I believe there is not an urgency to this discussion today, and that is that today the Premier has announced a standing policy committee that will be dedicated totally to health restructuring. What does that mean? That means that when areas of concern come forward, there is a direct input into that area. There is no question that there was a great deal of pressure on the standing policy committee that was dealing with health and three other areas.

So I believe that the processes are in place. The business plans are in place. The avenues of appeal are in place. On that area, I will tell you that the Health Facilities Review Committee in fact are having a reduction in numbers of queries at a time when we have fully advertised that committee. In every letter I write, every speech I make on the issue of concern, of adequacy of care, I encourage people to bring their concerns forward either to the Health Facilities Review Committee or to the College of Physicians and Surgeons if it's a physician concern. In fact it's interesting that those are reducing rather than increasing, which you might suspect if the hon. leader actually had a point.

Mr. Speaker, dollars don't make good health. Buildings don't deliver good care. It's the programs and the people. Physicians and health care workers in this province know that. I could go on, but I think I have spoken to the lack of need for urgency in this and the avenues for those concerns to be met that have been announced today.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the matter of urgency, and I'll try to be brief. The Minister of Health, in speaking against urgency, refers to the Capital regional health authority interim report, which is in fact an interesting document. It is interesting because it's an exercise in fact in the selective use of statistics, small samples, and irrelevant data. In no way at all does that alleviate the urgency. In fact, it heightens the urgency and the need to bring the issue directly into the Legislature.

Then the Minister of Health tries to make us all feel better by reinforcing the Premier's assertion that what we have here is a communications problem, not in fact a real crisis. It is a real crisis, and it cannot be addressed by simply creating another committee for another Conservative backbencher to get more money out of the public purse. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this is urgent to people all over the province. It's urgent to the people in my constituency, where over 400 of them replied to a questionnaire. In answer – before the Minister of Health leaves – to a simple question, "Do you believe the reduction of funding to health care in Alberta will decrease the quality of our health care system?" 90.8 percent said yes. If that isn't a crisis, I don't know what is.

Let me share with you how urgent people attending a recent forum in Calgary felt this issue was. Mrs. Cooper, who is the mother of a disabled young person, said, and I quote: it is now open season that has been declared on the disabled. It's certainly urgent to that Albertan. Mr. Austin from Calgary, who is a type 1 diabetic, said, and I quote: Klein is leaning towards a two-tiered system where the wealthy have the best health care money can buy. He went on to say: what's happening to health care is

hurting the poor most. That makes it urgent, Mr. Speaker. Sandy Renns from the United Nurses of Alberta says: it's not even sure that the system can be rebuilt; we can't look after patients anymore with any sense of dignity.

Mr. Speaker, it's urgent. It's urgent to Dr. Norm Schraker, who's an orthopedic surgeon in Calgary, when he says: corporate Alberta is doing just fine; it's individuals that are hurting. Randall Lloyd, who's a surgical processor working at a centre in Calgary, says, and I quote: cuts have cost lives. That is urgent.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader, succinctly on urgency.

MR. DAY: Very succinctly, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to look at the motion itself. I won't echo, though I could, significant statistics, not irrelevant data, as the member has called it, but significant statistics from the Minister of Health showing that indeed people are being served in this province and that in fact they are receiving service at a very healthy rate, if I can use that word.

If we want to get into just exchanging stories of people we've talked to, as if that has some kind of merit up against hard, statistical evidence, I can give you the names of the doctors I talked to just before question period when I relayed to them about this standing policy committee coming into place. They were very pleased to hear that and saw that as a very positive development and did not in any way seem to use a term like "chaos." So the motion itself . . . [interjections] Again, Mr. Speaker, you will notice that during question period today, members on this side sat quietly and respectfully while these members talked. Obviously they have not been taught manners: we don't receive that same courtesy.

3:20

I'll go on to say directly to the motion itself: it's premised on the fact, apparently, according to the Leader of the Opposition, the Premier's public admission that the government's health care reforms are "plagued with mistakes." His whole motion is premised on those words apparently being attributed to the Premier. Not only has the Premier never said that, never used any terminology like "plagued with mistakes" – the member opposite, the opposition leader, is so desperate to attribute negative words to the Premier. In the leader's remarks, did you hear what he said, Mr. Speaker? When he was talking about chaos, he said, and I quote because I wrote it down in amazed silence: the Premier could have used the word "chaos." The Premier could have used the word "chaos" That's his stunning indictment? I don't think so.

I will close now by saying that the Leader of the Opposition has said that if the Premier says something is so, it is so. That's the first time I've ever heard him say that. He's denied it when the Premier talked about the good state of the economy and everything else in the province, but now he's saying that if the Premier says it is so, it is so. The Premier never used the word "plagued," never even came close to it.

I'll close with a quote, with an actual, recorded quote, and this will determine how sincere this question of urgency is. I close with this, Mr. Speaker, a radio-taped quote: I think one of the reasons business comes to Alberta is probably the tax regime, but also, they come to Alberta because this is a wonderful place to live; it's got excellent health care. Quoted by the Liberal Leader of the Opposition on August 15, the day before my birthday. It was a good birthday present.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Chair is prepared to rule on the issue of leave for Standing Order 30 application. First, the Chair was provided with adequate advance notice of the motion by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. So the requirements of Standing Order 30(1) have been met.

Secondly, before the question can be put to the Assembly, the Chair must rule whether the motion contravenes any of the provisions of Standing Order 30(7). In this case, a similar motion was proposed on April 11, 1995, with respect to the alleged crisis in the health care system. At that time the Speaker ruled that the matter did not constitute "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration" as is required in subsection (7)(a). As is the case today, one side has argued that an emergency has existed, while the other side has contended it did not. Both have used statistics to supplement and to back their claims, or their assertions.

While it is up to the Chair to determine whether an emergency does in fact exist, it's worth repeating the comment of the Speaker on April 11 of this year that a "difference of opinion or the difference in policy [does not constitute] a genuine emergency." He also noted at that time that a "controversy is not always the same as an emergency."

The Chair would note that there would be ample opportunity to hold the government to account for the health care system during question period, as we have seen today, in the days and the weeks to come. Furthermore, the Chair notes that the very motion on the Order Paper, Motion 513, raises the issue of regional health authority board members, which relates directly, then, to the health care system.

Accordingly, the Chair rules that a genuine emergency does not exist, and the question will not be put.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places, except for Written Question 233.

Team Alberta Jackets

Q233. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that the following question be accepted:

With regard to the Team Alberta jackets that the government purchased or acquired surrounding primarily the 15th Canada Games, 1995, and perhaps other activities, will the Minister of Community Development please provide specific answers to the following questions:

- (1) in total, how many Team Alberta jackets were purchased or acquired by the government,
- (2) which company or companies produced them,
- (3) who designed these jackets, specifically the blue and orange crest that appears on the back,
- (4) when and by whom was the decision made to add the colour orange,
- (5) who authorized the use of orange on Team Alberta jackets,
- (6) what were the design costs and what were the manufacturing and/or production costs,
- (7) who paid the costs of designing, manufacturing, and delivery of these jackets,

- (8) to whom were these jackets given and in what quantities,
- (9) which government Members of the Legislative Assembly received one or more of these jackets,
- (10) which spouses or partners of government Members of the Legislative Assembly received these jackets and under what circumstances did they acquire them, and
- (11) will the Minister of Community Development provide copies of receipts regarding any jackets which were perhaps paid for by recipients?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government accepts Question 233.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 213
Public Accounts Committee Act**

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

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to speak in favour, naturally, of my Bill 213, Public Accounts Committee Act.

This Bill represents a reason for my re-entering public life, and that is to bring full accountability by elected officials to the province of Alberta. This will not be achieved until the Public Accounts Committee Act ensures that the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee is enshrined in legislation. We saw with great fanfare the tabling of numerous documents in this House, Mr. Speaker, in a great display of what is called full public disclosure and, I would suggest, a great deal of smugness that makes democracy indeed a mockery.

Why do I say that? Because when you look at the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee from the time of the Lougheed era, it has stagnated to the point that indeed it's an ineffective legislative committee.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

DR. L. TAYLOR: Well, get rid of it, then, Muriel.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that a member of the government would yell across this House, "Well, get rid of it." The very basis of financial accountability acknowledged around the world is the importance of the public accounts process. If the member wants to make light of that, so be it. I think it typifies what's all wrong with this government.

The principles of Bill 213 enshrine democratic process. We would not have had the financial fiascos that started in the Lougheed era, moved into the Getty era, and still continue today under this government if there had been full disclosure and full accountability. We still do not have that. Does anyone know, by using the public accounts process today, why these substantial dollars were lost in the name of the taxpayers of this province? No, we don't know; we still don't know where that money went. Until we have an effective public accounts process, we will never find the answers.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we've been debating the urgency of the health care system. Without an effective public accounts process, I would submit to this House that indeed you will never be able to deliver programs in an effective way until the Canadian Council of Public Accounts recommendations have been implemented. This province has 29 percent Public Accounts effectiveness inasmuch as we've only adopted 29 percent of the recommendations from the Canadian council. We need to adopt a hundred percent of these recommendations to make our public accounts process effective.

3:30

What is it this government's afraid of? It can't possibly be an innocuous Bill called Bill 213, Public Accounts Committee Act, that would bring full fiscal accountability to the province of Alberta. Is that what you're afraid of? Anyone who votes against this Bill is indeed voting against open disclosure. They're also voting against public servants being held fully accountable. That has not happened in the province of Alberta. Now, when you do not support this Bill, inasmuch as the principle is enshrining the mandate of Public Accounts in the province of Alberta – and indeed it would be a leader across North America – you are indeed defying or not taking seriously the Auditor General's report of '92-93, the Auditor General's reports of '91-92 and '93-94. When you look in the Auditor General's report of '91-92 and you go to page 8 – this is the Auditor General, so when you vote against this Bill, you're actually voting against the recommendations of previous Auditors General – on page 8 it says:

An effective Public Accounts Committee, working together with the Auditor General, can serve as a deterrent to poor administration and an incentive to rectify problems.

If indeed you took this recommendation seriously and implemented what the Auditor General said in '91-92, I would suggest you wouldn't have had the fiasco that we have previously had to deal with in this House and over the time that the House has been in recess: Swan Hills, Bovar. How do you ever get to the bottom of how moneys are invested so poorly in the name of the taxpayers by this government without being able to scrutinize and bring civil servants into the House under oath so that we know: is there direct political interference in the process, or indeed have the civil servants not been doing their job?

Now we'll look at the Auditor General's report of '92-93 and go to page 9. Once again we're hearing from the Auditor General.

Improving The Financial Administration Of The Province
I believe that the Public Accounts Committee should be concerned with ensuring that the policies and programs of government are implemented in an effective, efficient, and economical manner. In my 1991-92 annual report, I stated that the Public Accounts Committee should . . .

I would urge all members: read the Auditor General's report; refresh your memory. In it it says:

- . . . call deputy ministers and senior managers, who are primarily responsible for administration, rather than ministers, to answer for the implementation of government policy; and
- prepare recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on how the administration of government policy could be improved.

That's the Auditor General saying it, with members on the government side laughing at the suggestion that we should enshrine within legislation the mandate of Public Accounts.

Now, if the Minister of Health and the Premier are serious that they want the assistance of the Official Opposition to make sure we have an effective and efficient health care delivery system, the one way to start ensuring that our dollars are expended in the most effective, efficient ways and that programs are being delivered as the policy of this government dictates is by ensuring that you can call civil servants before the Public Accounts Committee. That's what we call full accountability. Full accountability is when a minister sits before a Public Accounts Committee in a nonpartisan setting and is held accountable for the expenditure in his department. If you have fiascos like the NovAtel and the Bovar, that minister's head, quite bluntly, should roll. That's accountability. We have never seen any degree of accountability in this province. There's been no accountability.

Now let's move to '93-94, with '91-92, '92-93 totally ignored. They're all Auditor General.

DR. L. TAYLOR: You're living in the past, Muriel.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: No, I'm not living in the past. I wish, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans would realize that the only people living in the past is this government, because they haven't learned one thing. The former Provincial Treasurer used to come into this House and pull the wool over everybody's eyes, and the cabinet blessed him. I see the very same mockery and thumbs being stuck on the nose to Albertans: "Oh, it's wonderful; we're pulling one over. We don't have chaos in health care. We don't want an effective Public Accounts Committee because, God help us, we might be held accountable for our fiscal messes."

Now we look at the '93-94 Auditor General's report, and we go to page 10. One of the first guidelines is: "Accountability is necessary when responsibility is assigned and authority is delegated." Now, we have heard from government members that we don't really have a mechanism to know how effective privatization is going to be in the province of Alberta. If we indeed enshrined the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee through this legislative process, we would have a mechanism that would allow us to bring Crown corporations, private-sector companies through delegation before the Public Accounts Committee. Only then would we as legislators be able to assess indeed: has privatization worked? Has it been effective? Has it saved the taxpayer money? All of North America is asking those questions. So I would say: let's be leaders in North America and ensure that Bill 213 becomes legislation and enshrines the mandate following the recommendations of the Canada public accounts committee.

You know, it's really disturbing when you hear a comment made by the Deputy Chairman of Public Accounts, and I would ask that he indeed support this Bill. The quote that I want to use is: I have the dubious distinction of being the vice-chairman of the committee right now, and being fairly new in all of this, my observation is that it's very little more than an extension of the existing question period. I really couldn't disagree. That's why

we need to change the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee. Their own government member says it's useless, it's ineffective, yet during the session we come in on a Wednesday morning, we sit down and ask questions. Ministers decide whether they will answer or the civil servants will answer. They stray into policy; they challenge the Chair. They think it's a huge joke. Well, Mr. Speaker, Public Accounts is not a huge joke; it's what we call ensuring fiscal responsibility in the province of Alberta.

So when I'm asking for this House to support this, what I'm asking the members not only of the Official Opposition but also on the government side of the House is to do what a wise Premier asked back in 1972 during the throne speech. That man was Premier Lougheed. He acknowledged the importance of Public Accounts. Unfortunately, in acknowledging the importance he didn't take it far enough, and it stagnated from that point on. I quote from *Hansard* of March 2, 1972, page 4:

To ensure that objective, non-partisan scrutiny is given to the public accounts, my government will propose that a Member of the Opposition be appointed Chairman of the Committee on Public Accounts.

That was Peter Lougheed who did that. I would say that was well thought through, and it was sincere at the time, but we haven't progressed from there.

3:40

Now, I have suggested on many occasions that we indeed should make this a nonpartisan forum. I believe it's achievable, but it's only achievable if indeed you take the Canada public accounts committee and the legislative auditors' recommendations. [interjection] I'm hearing the government member across the way saying: no, no. They're so afraid, Mr. Speaker, of full accountability. They're so afraid to show Albertans how money's been expended. They're so afraid to look at where did all the public dollars go.

You know, we had a government, and I still see the same symptoms: nine consecutive budget deficits. If we'd had a meaningful Public Accounts Committee, I would suggest they'd be lucky if they got passed two deficit budgets. They had a \$32 billion debt. We had the NovAtels of this world. We had the Lloydminster biprovincial upgrader. We had the Gainers. We had the MagCans. We had Northern Lite Canola, Chembiomed, General Systems Research, Myrias Research Corporation, Northern Steel, and now of course Bovar. What do we not know? I would suggest that if you had an effective Public Accounts, we'd be able to find out where more money was wasted over the years in this province. Without finding out where the wastage is within our system, you cannot deliver effective and efficient programs.

I'll liken it, Mr. Speaker, to two homemakers or two farmers that suddenly find themselves in difficult fiscal times. I'm a responsible parent. My first commitment is to my children. I want to be sure that my children are well fed and that they have soles on their shoes when they walk to school. I'm the farmer. I want to make sure that I get seed to sow. Then the other homemaker can't give up that rich way of living, so they still buy their sirloin steak, and they still buy their wines, and the child goes to school without a decent lunch in their box, and they've got holes in their soles. Or there's the farmer who likes his high-tech equipment, so he goes out and buys his combine but forgets to get the seed. This is the symptom of this government. They're still living high off the hog.

We keep hearing about these standing committees being put in place. Now, I can remember, Mr. Speaker, sitting on a funding

formula. Actually, it was from the Provincial Treasurer who was the minister of community health, and we sat for days and weeks and months on end and came up with this wonderful, equitable provincial funding formula. Guess what happened to it? It was so equitable that it was going to cause some politicians a difficult time in their constituencies. So guess what happened? It was put on the shelf, and there it remained, just like The Rainbow Report, because everybody didn't like it politically. During that process, guess what's happening? There's taxpayers' money going out there to support these committees where the stuff's shelved. I would submit to you that after 90 days if this government doesn't like what this committee found because it might cost somebody a little bit of a re-election problem, they won't implement it. It'll gather some more dust.

Now, that's why you need to enshrine the Public Accounts Committee mandate in legislation: so that we can look at when committees are put in place what happens to the findings of them? How much did it cost the taxpayer? What did they find that was ineffective in our delivery system so that we as policymakers can correct it?

You know, the other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that I've heard time and time again from this government: why don't you bring forward positive solutions? Well, the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan continually brings forward, and I would suggest Official Opposition members, part of the solutions for some of the dilemmas that we Albertans face. What do they do? "Oh, no, no, no. You lost. We don't want your recommendations."

The paper that I tabled here from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan on the restructuring of the health care system was a meaningful document, well thought out. Taking Responsibility, the justice system document. If they had been implemented, we would be well on our way to correcting some of our community problems. But, no, this government, it's lip service when they're saying that they want good advice.

This Bill, Bill 213, is good advice. It's good legislation. It would make us a leader in North America. We would be able indeed, Mr. Speaker, through the Public Accounts – and we'll get into this when we get into committee. If we used this as a vehicle to examine closely past expenditures, I would submit to you that we would be able to redirect significant dollars into areas that are much needed: be it education, be it health. I am convinced that if you had the type of scrutiny that Bill 213 is asking for, your whole budget process would become more meaningful because you would have scrutinized past expenditure.

You know, before I go into looking at my budget at home for the next year, I look at how I expended my money in the past. Where was the waste in my own budget? Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I wish I could convince my physician husband to do the same, because maybe medical clinics would be more effective in how they spend money.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 213 today. My reading of the Bill indicates that the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan has good intentions. She wants to see that the government is accountable for its actions and for the dollars that it spends. I think that's important to all of us, but I believe that this hon. member goes wrong in her approach to accountability. She's put

forward a Bill which creates duplication, possibly a monster committee, at high cost to Alberta taxpayers.

I'm glad that she acknowledged my comments from an earlier *Hansard*. I've made several comments on accountability and effectiveness, and I'd be glad to repeat them if she wants. I haven't changed my opinion. Mr. Speaker, I want accountability as much as the hon. member does, but I don't think the solution is to throw money at a problem and to duplicate services. Albertans want the government to get away from that type of thinking. I think Albertans don't want or need legislation which duplicates services. The Auditor General already performs most of the functions that are outlined in this Bill. Bill 213 would give the Public Accounts Committee comparable authority and a mandate equal to that of the Auditor General, and I question why we would even want to consider doing that.

The amount of additional tax dollars required to give the committee this unnecessary, unwarranted, and duplicating role would be significant. I can understand spending money if we get something for it, but Bill 213 legislates duplication, giving no added value for the taxpayers' money. Why would we make the Public Accounts Committee an investigative authority with responsibility for accounts, business plans, budgets, financial control systems, performance reports, any other working papers relating to provincial operations, agencies, corporations, and any provincially funded group? The Auditor General already does these things, and we have hundreds of pages of reports and documents fully available to the public.

These reports are scrutinized by the committee every week that the House is in session. Accountability is being well served by the committee as it stands now. Having committee members sit through massive amounts of information just to be able to compare what the departments are doing would just lead to confusion. Few members in the committee would have the time or the resources or the capability to fully analyze the information as prescribed by Bill 213. The committee would likely get bogged down in nit-picking and witch-hunts.

3:50

I also have some concerns about legitimate confidentiality of some of the material that the committee would be dealing with. There are no enforceable provisions that I know of to protect the confidentiality of such material.

Now, what about the cost of having the committee members meet at any time out of session? At present the committee meets only when the House is sitting. This Bill would see the taxpayer foot the bill to have all committee members coming back and forth to Edmonton a couple of hours every week throughout the year. When the House is in session, members are here anyway. That was the logical reasoning to the present system.

The traditional conventions allow for some flexibility within which the committee can already modify its operations to suit the majority. The point is that changing the conduct of the committee will occur with or without this Bill if the government wants it. It can change it by motion in committee or by recommendation of the Parliamentary Reform Committee. The efficiency of the present system is better than anything that this Bill is going to provide.

As I said earlier, this committee would do nothing more than create a monster committee with broad power to look at almost any matter, call staff members or anyone else that wishes to give evidence under oath.

When I read this, I had visions of big and expensive, an inquiry committee similar to what we see in the United States. With a

panel of 11 powerful Members of the Legislative Assembly the committee could summon virtually anyone it wishes. I don't think we need this kind of a system. I don't think Albertans want another bureaucracy or a duplicated watchdog. Keeping the Public Accounts Committee as it is now provides for a good balance between responsibility, affordability, and accountability. Bill 213 would have it become bureaucratic, cumbersome, and expensive.

I urge all members of this Assembly to vote against the Bill. Thank you.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this Bill at second reading. I do so on a number of grounds of basic principle. First is that of accountability. I was astounded to hear the hon. member talk about the Public Accounts Committee being effective. If it were effective, we would not have a \$32 billion debt. If it were effective, we would actually know who was responsible for NovAtel. There would actually be some names named, ministers or deputy ministers. We would know more detail about Gainers. Somebody would actually be brought in and somebody would be held accountable for over \$2 billion in business losses. That was then; this is now. It's all water under the bridge, \$2 billion worth of water under the bridge, because there was no mechanism of accountability and no scrutiny, no way of bringing somebody in and saying, "Who made the decision, where are the documents, and how can we prevent this from happening again?"

What this Bill envisages at minimum cost – and I think it's very clear that this could be done with the budget that the Public Accounts Committee has now of \$8,000. It could be done for less, because what it involves is bringing ministers in, bringing their civil servants in and holding them accountable for outcomes and performance. When things go wrong within government, somebody has to be accountable. The buck has to stop somewhere other than in fact at the expense of taxpayers.

So a smoothly functioning Public Accounts Committee is certainly consistent with the principles of accountability and fiscal accountability. I think this Bill, then, outlines a mechanism that is consistent with what the Canadian organization has argued, with what the Auditor General has argued.

Another issue of accountability deals with health care. If you go through the recommendations of the Auditor General's reports in '92-93, '93-94, each and every year it points out that we cannot measure costs in health care, we cannot measure the cost of delivering services in health care, and there's a real problem of reliability of information in health care. Those recommendations have been there. What's happened? Nothing. There is just no way of holding the ministers or senior civil servants accountable for the recommendations that you find in the Auditor General's reports.

Again, if you look at the latest public accounts that came out, there are 17 regional health authorities in this province, Mr. Speaker. Four of them had audited public accounts; 13 of them did not. Of the 13 that did not, two had accounts that were one page in length each. They were characterized as a hodgepodge of conflicting numbers. Some had amortization in them; some did not. Even the Minister of Health said: well, amortization, that's just an accounting issue; that's not real. And she sits right next to the Treasurer. You would have expected the Treasurer to say,

"Madam Minister, we're talking about a real cost of doing service, the wear and tear and the need to replace capital equipment." That certainly could be done by a smoothly functioning and effective Public Accounts Committee.

The issue of accountability is important in day-to-day operations and in terms of looking at how we lost so much money, how we had programs that were entirely ineffective and just lived on through inertia. I think the Public Accounts Committee and the changes to that committee as set out in the Act would go a long way to ensuring that Albertans had in place a permanent mechanism of accountability. So the first issue or principle I judge this Bill by is that of accountability.

The second is that of transparency. One would think that a government that wants to be open and transparent – and certainly given the volume of material that was dumped on desks today, the numbers of trees that bit the dust in order to make the government look good on the opening of this session . . . Transparency is more than paper though. Transparency is knowing that the numbers are reliable, knowing how they were generated, and knowing how they fit together. A good functioning Public Accounts Committee can do that, Mr. Speaker.

The recommendations that are brought forward in Bill 213, those that are brought forward by the Canadian Council of Public Accounts, and in fact suggested by the Auditor General all go a long way to making the government far more transparent. It's consistent, then, with the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. So why you would conceivably vote against greater accountability and more transparency is beyond me when it's consistent with the recommendations of the Auditor General and the Canadian Council of Public Accounts.

The third issue deals with that of nonpartisanship, and my colleague from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan touched upon this. The Public Accounts Committee is an all-party committee. It provides, then, a mechanism for colleagues in the House to work together to try and make government more effective, more accountable and transparent. What we've seen to date is a proliferation of all Conservative committees and groupthink on these committees in terms of how to approach policy issues and the like. The Public Accounts Committee can work and be far more effective than it is by institutionalizing some of the recommendations that have been found in the Auditor General's report and elsewhere.

What this Bill does is institutionalize good practices in terms of managerial accountability and transparency. It's also consistent, then, with the Legislature working collectively to a common goal, which is to ensure that government programs are delivered at the least cost and in the most effective, accountable fashion.

So I read this Bill and I don't think it creates a monster committee. What it does is just institutionalize what experts in the area say will work. It's also a vehicle by which many questions that pop up in question period could in fact be addressed within the Public Accounts Committee, a better forum for so doing.

Again, I've heard hon. colleagues say: get rid of the committee. Well, I think it's important that you do scrutinize how money is spent. We look at budgets and we see how money is going to be spent in the coming year, but there has to be a mechanism to ensure that the money that was spent was spent wisely.

Again what this Bill attempts to do is ensure that the Auditor General and the members of the committee can ensure value for money. I would be amazed if hon. members in this House vote against a Bill that says: let's ensure that we get value for money

in delivering government services. I would be incredulous to see members stand and vote against good governance and greater accountability and value for money.

I hope that when hon. members look at the principles that are embodied in this Bill – greater accountability, transparency, and nonpartisanship – they will see fit to pass this in second reading and address any of their other concerns in Committee of the Whole stage through amendments.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I conclude.

4:00

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

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to speak to Bill 213 today. Like many other members of this Assembly I spent several terms on Public Accounts, so I have been there, so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, accountability in government is important. We would all agree with that. It is one of the pillars of our democratic process. Without it democracy is simply an empty shell. With it democracy flourishes and citizens get a government of the people, for the people, and by the people. The sponsor of Bill 213 claims that the passage of this Bill will help us avoid future problems and debacles, which will help make government more accountable. She believes that expanding the scope and size, and inevitably the cost, of her committee will make government more accountable.

Many of the sections of Bill 213 already exist, such as the composition of its membership by the way of a motion of the committee, and other parts of the Bill that are new for the committee, such as the examination of planned expenditures of all government departments, are already done in a number of ways. Planned expenditures, for example, can be seen by the entire public in the budget and quarterly reports, and referring these documents to the committee for review would be simply a duplication. These documents are available to anyone who wants them, and I don't believe that we need to have a committee deciding whether or not government is accountable. We ought to let Albertans decide that. This government lets Albertans do just that. That's a lot more accountable than having the Public Accounts Committee under the dome review these documents in isolation to determine accountability.

Another element of accountability is freedom of information, which has just been implemented, Mr. Speaker. This fortifies the government's promise of more open and accountable government. Any Albertan can request information, thereby permitting him or her to understand government better and make informed choices about government.

The bottom line is that the hon. member wants to expand her committee under the guise of accountability. The problem, however, is that the imaginative and innovative ideas of this government and its hardworking employees to bring government back to the people of Alberta have gone miles beyond what the sponsor sees as being accountable. Freedom of information, quarterly reports, performance indicators, and the Auditor General all provide excellent checks on the system and make government truly accountable to Albertans. The committee's role fits in with these tools of accountability, but expanding its role is complete duplication that Albertans don't want or need. Passage of Bill 213 would duplicate the work of the Auditor General, effectively creating another Auditor General in the form of a monster committee able to call forward anyone at any time. The government has moved away from complicated procedures and bureau-

cratic systems such as that and has brought accountability directly to the people. Letting Albertans be our judge and jury is fine by me. They are our stewards, and we deserve to treat them that way instead of turning away back under the dome to determine what the people of Alberta want for them.

The sponsor of Bill 213 is pushing for us to adopt the guidelines of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, guidelines which this committee has rejected on at least two occasions and which the Parliamentary Reform Committee has also rejected. Also important to note is that these guidelines of this council have been set out by other public accounts committees which have a rigid set of rules and blinders on with respect to alternatives for accountability outside the realm of public accounts committees, such as the quarterly reports of freedom of information.

Another problem is that extended times, when the committee meets outside of session, can be very costly, as members are brought in from out of town, fed, and put up, all at taxpayers' expense. This is very costly for a committee which is merely duplicating the work of the freedom of information commissioner and the Auditor General.

Albertans demanded that we stop wasting valuable resources on duplication of services and be more responsible with tax dollars. We have delivered. We will soon have a balanced budget, and we are truly accountable for every tax dollar thanks to the role of the Auditor General, the freedom of information, the quarterly reports, the performance indicators, and the Government Accountability Act passed this spring.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think Albertans want another bureaucracy or a duplicated watchdog. Keeping the Public Accounts Committee as it is now provides for a balance between responsibility, affordability, and accountability. Bill 213 would have it become bureaucratic, cumbersome, and expensive. I urge all members of this Assembly to vote against Bill 213.

Thank you.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise, not surprisingly, in support of Bill 213 at second reading. There's something to be said for consistency, because last spring I stood in support of then Bill 40, now government law, and that was the Government Accountability Act, when the government came forward with that. I think there's an onus on all members of this Assembly to support moves and initiatives towards accountability whenever they come up and from whichever side of the floor they come from. I'm disappointed to hear the members for Olds-Didsbury and Peace River speak against this measure.

It is about accountability. When we look at the government track record, the \$2.2 billion in losses that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud earlier mentioned, I think there are improvements that can be made, and sometimes improvements have a price tag. They may take more of our time, Mr. Speaker, but I think we can find efficiencies so that we can maintain the cost. Sometimes we do have to travel somewhere to attend a meeting and to hear the views of our constituents, and sometimes we have to travel to the Legislature to bring those views here and to debate them. That is the cost of a parliamentary democracy.

When I heard the hon. Member for Peace River describe this as duplication without any value added – Mr. Speaker, it's not duplication. This Bill is not duplication. If it were in place some

10 years ago, it could have prevented \$2.2 billion in losses. My constituents certainly think that \$2.2 billion is a lot of money. [interjection] Well, you know, perhaps to this Provincial Treasurer and the previous Provincial Treasurer this was a chunk of change because it was taxpayers' dollars. I'm sure they don't treat their own money the way they've treated taxpayers' dollars. Certainly this is – how would I put it? It's a fairly vivid description to call this a monster committee with broad power to call and summon a wide scope of individuals to testify under oath.

Mr. Speaker, if anything I think we require more of that. People should be brought to testify under oath as to how the government is spending their dollars. All too often we see stacks of paper that are stacked not nearly quite as high as I am myself, but they've been sanitized. They're PR documents. They're missing the content. If those elements which were removed prior to these documents being printed were ever exposed to the public, to the taxpayer, I can tell you they would be outraged and they themselves would demand that this committee be put in place.

Why legislate the committee to overlook the work that the Auditor General has already undertaken is another question that the hon. Member for Peace River asked. Well, I take a look back to a December 6, 1994, press release from the Liberal opposition. We took a look at the year-by-year results – that's what we looked at – of the recommendations of the Auditor General, and to his credit there were a lot of very solid recommendations in there, Mr. Speaker, many of which had been made by the Liberal opposition in the Assembly prior to being printed.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, 1992-93 is a year I want to look at. Ten recommendations that were made were implemented, or 21.3 percent; 26 recommendations that were made were partially implemented, or 55.3 percent. Another 11 recommendations that were made were not implemented at all, and that was a total of 23.4 percent. So a quarter of the recommendations made by the Auditor General on how to improve the accountability system of this government were not implemented, and you know, it begs the question why. Were they inconvenient? Would that cover that area of those documents that were sanitized prior to those documents being printed? I daresay that's probably the case. That's what's being eliminated. Those are the recommendations that are not being considered by this government because it doesn't suit their agenda, and most importantly it wouldn't be beneficial to their PR exercise, which we see so much of.

There is this mention from the Member for Peace River that this Bill would somehow lead to the confusion of committee members. Well, Mr. Speaker, I sit on that committee, and I would not at all be confused. I regret to think that member may be confused by it, but you know, we can be seated as we wish during those committees, and he's more than welcome to sit next to me and I'll try to walk him through this.

This committee is not a committee which nitpicks. It is not a committee that goes after witch-hunts. Mr. Speaker, when we're pursuing the loss of \$2.2 billion, you can call it a witch-hunt or you can call it whatever you wish, nit-picking. To me it's neither of those. It's searching for accountability. It's scrutinizing public accounts, making government accountable.

Mr. Speaker, then he went on to say that somehow this nit-picking would infringe upon privacy. Well, I sat on that committee as well. In fact, one of those meaningful and purposeful all-party panels of this Legislature, the freedom of information panel, which was put together by the Premier, one of his first Acts, worked together and delivered a meaningful piece of legislation

which has since been implemented, but we're yet to test how effectively it's going to be operationalized. That Act that was put together by the all-party panel, a complete representation of this Legislature, would protect the privacy of those individuals whose privacy needs to be protected.

Mr. Speaker, when someone comes hat in hand to the public coffer, they can expect that they may be stripped of some of their privacy. In fact, I myself, when I came to this Legislature, didn't realize how closely Members of the Legislative Assembly are scrutinized on an annual basis. My two and a half year old son has to disclose his complete accounts to this government, and I think it's appropriate we do that, but I can't see why we would have a double standard for someone who comes to the government hat in hand asking for \$500 million or \$300 million. I just don't see that argument.

Then I heard some comments that were made by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury. He seemed to imply that the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan was desiring to expand the scope, the size, and the cost of this committee without realizing any effectiveness. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I've spoken closely and on numerous occasions with the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, and in fact never did she have a desire to increase or expand the scope, the size, or increase the cost of this committee. In fact, out of many of the members that I've spoken to in this Assembly, this is one member who I can say wants to keep the costs of running government to its minimum but not to strip it of its effectiveness. I've heard the argument many times from the other side where they're actually edging away at the effectiveness of many of the committees of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I also heard the Member for Olds-Didsbury talk about: well, the public accounts, we release it on an annual basis, and it's information which is available to everyone. All Albertans can pick up these 2,000 pages worth of numbers, not that they can necessarily track them from year to year because things disappear and then they reappear, so they can't make sense out of it. In fact, I would dare say that very few people who deal with public accounts on a regular basis can make sense of the numbers that are presented there, but this committee provides us with an opportunity to ask those very questions.

For example, I take a look at this year's public accounts where there's \$540 million in new health premiums that appear. I can't quote the page, and I won't look through the public accounts right now.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thirty-seven.

MR. SEKULIC: Let's say that it is page 37. Mr. Speaker, I looked back to the previous year for the identical line number to see what we as a province brought in in health care premiums and fees, and you know what? Well, you'd be shocked. I couldn't find it. It wasn't there. Five hundred and forty million new tax dollars grabbed this year, but you can't correlate it to anything in the previous year. We don't know what this province has done. So I must assume that they have now grabbed 540 million new dollars out of taxpayers' pockets, and they say: no new taxes. Well, hardly. If you read the public accounts, and if my constituents read those public accounts, they would say, "These are new tax dollars." [interjection] Yes, if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck and quacks, it is a duck.

I think we have to let Albertans be the judges, and that's one thing the Member for Olds-Didsbury did say quite correctly. He did say that we have to let Albertans be the judges. Well, Mr.

Speaker, if we are to let Albertans be the judges, then I would suggest to you that we have to put before them information which they can understand and correlate from year to year to year. In fact, we call those facts. We call those facts. That's something that I think has been missing, and if it weren't missing, I can tell you we would not be in the debt we are today; \$32 billion worth of gross debt is what this province is in. If we had facts in front of Albertans, the fiscally responsible Albertans that I know and represent in my constituency would not have permitted this province or the apprentices of these journeymen to bring us to the debt we're in today.

There is one more area in this Bill that I'd like to defend. That's clause 6. What it states is that this committee, which I currently sit on, the Public Accounts Committee, would meet year-round. Well, Mr. Speaker, budgeting is a year-round exercise, so is scrutiny. Only if we're to scrutinize those books and the budgeting aspects of government on an annual basis throughout the year can we hold this government accountable. I would say that this is an excellent tool by which we can make government accountable and prevent the obscene losses of the past from occurring again in the future.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I would advise and suggest to all members of the Assembly that this Bill is worth their support, and I would hope that when the time comes, they will stand and support it, as I did when Bill 40 appeared the past spring, the Government Accountability Act. This is an extension of that Bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 213. This Bill mentions accountability and openness. Well, this government is about accountability and openness. This government was the first government in Canada to have three-year business plans made public for everybody to look at. They're updated yearly. Every year we'd update our plans. We have the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which was just proclaimed October 1, that will access any information that the general public or the opposition wants.

AN HON. MEMBER: For a fee.

MR. SEVERTSON: That's right; for a fee. The Liberals think that spending hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars for frivolous information gathering is good. That's what they would like: free information for that caucus. This Bill is much the same. It's about spending money. We already have an Auditor General that will look after the general public. The Auditor General is responsible to this Assembly – he's an officer of the Assembly – to look into the accountability of what government spends and the actions of government. But this Bill expands and wants to take the role of the Auditor General. Mr. Speaker, I think it's a total waste of taxpayers' money.

4:20

The other thing that we have is openness. We have quarterly reports of our budget year as it goes on about a month or two after the quarter's over. Before it took a year before we had our accounts payable published. Now we have them by June of the year ending March 31.

Mr. Speaker, the sponsor of this Bill, the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, talked about the effectiveness of the present Public Accounts, and she went on about how it didn't work. Well, maybe she should step aside as chairman if it's not working. She has the ability to examine the past records of all government spending. They have the ability to call the Auditor General and the ministers before Public Accounts to ask them questions, and many of the ministers bring their deputy ministers and people from their departments to answer questions.

I look at the role and mandate of this committee, section 7, where it says "planned expenditures." Well, Mr. Speaker, every year in this Legislature we bring a budget in. We have 20 days of estimates for this Assembly, as Committee of the Whole, to go through details of the planned expenditures, plus we have four other subcommittees where the opposition is allowed to designate any department to go through and examine their expenditures. But in this Bill they want to be able to call the committee to examine planned expenditures, to duplicate what the Assembly does as Committee of the Whole.

Another area is section (b), to "investigate and report to the Legislative Assembly on the privatization of any Provincial corporation." Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that is the role of the cabinet minister who's responsible for that area or Executive Council, and it again is brought forward in question period and debated in this Assembly, the accountability of those actions.

Then you go on to the other roles and mandates of (c), (d), and (e). I've said before that the Auditor General already has that ability, to function on a request of the Assembly to look into any of these matters that are mentioned in that role or mandate.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's strictly duplication of the ability of this Assembly and the ability of the Auditor General to cover what we presently do. This Bill is just a duplication which would be more expenditures to the taxpayers of Alberta and accomplish nothing else. So I would request members to reject Bill 213.

Thank you.

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

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say a few words on behalf and in support of Bill 213, which I think is a significant Bill. I've listened with great interest to members opposite. The first two speakers, by the way, were kind enough to commend the sponsor for all of her efforts, but all the while, as they were saying and ladling out that praise, it was quite evident there was a large "but" lurking in the woods. It came out of course. They were going to vote against this. The third speaker, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, didn't even bother to put on the gloves. He said straight from the bat that he was going to oppose this Bill.

I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, to go into the reasons why the Bill ought to be supported and also the reasons why probably no one on the other side will support it.

First of all, members on the government side like to lay claim to conducting an open government. They believe in performance measures. They use terms like "honest accounting" with great frequency. They also claim freedom of information legislation which they, I think, consider is probably the best in the world. So obviously for them it is hard to believe that there is any need for a Public Accounts Committee.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's right.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Of course the member for Cypress Hills is going to speak against this eventually. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out to Bow Valley and Cypress Hills and other speakers from that area who don't take the time to rise to their feet and answer any allegations that their particular protestations of open government and so on have absolutely no substance. When we look at the record, there is no substance to their claims, and their actions in fact speak a lot louder than words.

They proclaim open government. Well, I don't know how many times we've posed questions, written questions, I don't know how many times we've come up with motions for returns, and we've been stymied, stymied time and time again, by ministers on the other side who were backed up by all the troops on that side whenever we called for a standing vote. Open government?

I'm reminded, Mr. Speaker, once again of this particular connection after one of these many standing votes. The session was dissolved. We walked outside. I happened to be side by side with a member on the other side, and I said to him – of course, I can't mention his name – how in tarnation can you time and time again stand up and vote against release of that information when you were campaigning in the last election on the basis of open government? He said: Duco, when I got elected, my principles went out the window. All I could say was: yes, I had noticed that.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that's why it's all the more important that we have a committee like the Public Accounts Committee to help out the Auditor General in his work, because the Auditor General needs this particular help. We cannot emphasize openness and honesty enough. Let's face it; we have a freedom of information Act now which costs people \$25 to even ask a question, let alone the processing of it. It may take a lot more money. It costs the most in the whole of Canada, by the way. There's no other government that charges more for that kind of request. So is that a commitment to openness, honesty? No. I think that if they're truly committed, they should take the risk: vote in favour of this particular Bill. They cannot go wrong there.

Somebody talked about the cost. I even took the time to look on page 10 of some information I have here. It says that in 1993-94 there was \$18,500 budgeted for this particular committee. The actual expenditure was \$603, and that was all before the last election. In '94-95 the budget was just over \$9,000. The actual expenditure was \$27.41. Why? Because – and this is particularly for the ears of Little Bow – nobody charged any stipend, nobody got reimbursed. If this committee were to get together and hold meetings outside of session, then out of the \$8,000 that had been budgeted for this year, there's more than sufficient to defray such costs as mileage. So I don't think there's any problem.

My colleague from Edmonton-Manning asked me to convey his particular thought that he neglected to convey, namely that he does not collect any fees for sitting on this current Public Accounts Committee or the freedom of information all-party panel, by the way. Now, I'd like to say to the members on the other side: stick that in your pipe.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to cede the floor to the next person, who will undoubtedly speak in favour of this important Act, but I'd like to exhort the members opposite, too, to vote for honesty and transparency, to vote for this Bill.

Thank you.

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

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Cypress Hills.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Cypress Hills, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

I'm pleased to be able to address the Bill today, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Where?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Cypress-Medicine Hat, to the hon. members that didn't hear it the first time.

You know, I'd like to be able to accept some of the arguments for the passage of this Bill today from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, but it's with a sense of deep sadness – deep sadness – that I cannot do that, Mr. Speaker. I see the chairman wiping her eyes. I can understand that.

Mr. Speaker, I have sat on this committee for two and a half years, ever since we were elected, and I can honestly say that I attended faithfully – faithfully – most of the meetings. But I simply cannot and will not accept the waste of taxpayers' dollars. Really this committee as it exists today, and even as the member wants to expand it, is just an unnecessary duplication. No; this Bill is being proposed just so that the Public Accounts Committee can become larger, and that is due to the fact that the member chairs it. Bill 213, you know, simply expands a small empire. I'm not sure . . .

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: A point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan on a point of order.

Point of Order Referring to Party Affiliation

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Section 23(h), (i), and (j). Mr. Speaker, I distinctly heard him imputing motives of why Bill 213 is coming forward. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is inferring that through Bill 213 somehow I will gain. I'd like to point out that I do not accept any remuneration for chairing the Public Accounts Committee. I did not accept the benefit of a car. In fact, I would ask the member to look closely at the budget of Public Accounts, how it has been reduced significantly to \$8,000. If I can find my notes, the expenditure of the Public Accounts Committee for '94-95 was a grand total of \$27.41.

I believe an apology is owed to myself. There is no suggestion through Bill 213 that this is going to grow in size. In fact, it's the exact opposite. The Bill asks for it to be substantially reduced. I would also suggest that I don't think there's a committee in this Legislature that could claim in the '94-95 budget year a grand total expenditure of \$27.00. Mr. Speaker, I would expect an apology forthcoming.

MR. HAVELOCK: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, you can't have a point of order on a point of order.

MR. HAVELOCK: Could I address this one?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: No.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I don't certainly mind if Calgary-Shaw has something that he wishes to address on this issue. I don't mind, Mr. Speaker, that he does so.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly to point out to the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, there is one committee of this Legislature which actually spent less than hers did. Law and Regulations spent zero last year.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitated to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw to make some comments. I wish I would have stuck to my guns. However, I think, hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, I was listening very carefully to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, and I don't believe that he ever insinuated – and I could be wrong – that you would benefit from this committee. Now, if he wants to clarify what he said, that's fine with me, but I never picked that up from his remarks.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly agree with you.

Debate Continued

DR. L. TAYLOR: It's interesting that the member opposite thinks that rewards only have to be monetary. It says something about her perspective. What I did say was that Bill 213 is an attempt to build an empire. You know, it's like she's a wanna-be cabinet minister or something, with visions of grandeur, you know. This Bill in fact does nothing to enhance government accountability. The mere proposal of the Bill indicates to me that the member opposite, the chairman of the committee, has not been watching very carefully how the government has opened up its books for the public to see. I mean, doesn't she pay attention? The Bill requires that we go back to the old ways of doing things where Liberals thought that big committees were the solution to all the problems. In fact, it seems to me that the Liberals always attack with their greatest indignation when they fear that the public is understanding what is going on.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

You know, this group opposite wants to go back to looking at books under the dome, where the public really doesn't know what's happening, instead of the public deciding on merit if the government is being responsible with their taxes. That's what we're about, Mr. Speaker. We're about allowing the electors to make the decision, not the Liberals, who want to forget about the electors and sit here and examine books. We want the electors to make the decision. You know, in my constituency if you come out and say, "I'm from the government and I want to help" – and that's basically what this Bill is about – we all know the response we'll get. My constituents want less government. Less government is better government, and I don't hesitate to say that.

Albertans are our bosses, and if we foul up, Mr. Speaker, we should be thrown out of office. I say that throughout my constituency. I'm not ashamed to say that, and I think that's true. The Liberals are not all our bosses. You know, the Liberals seem

to think that God reigns in heaven and the Liberals reign in Edmonton, but I can assure them that will be shown not to be true in the next election.

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order has been raised. Would you care to share it with us, Sherwood Park.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, you have on many occasions in the debate that occurs in this Assembly with respect to private members' Bills . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the citation. It's in relation to . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Perhaps we're talking about 23, where we have imputes motives, that kind of thing.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will raise the point of order under section 23. The point of order I raise is that when we are in debate on private members' Bills, the Speaker has indicated to the Assembly many times that it is not Conservative members and Liberal members. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has continually referred in this debate to Conservatives and Liberals and has taken a great deal of time in the debate to use disparaging remarks about Liberals. This is debate on a private member's Bill to be debated by private members amongst themselves, not along party lines.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

DR. L. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I made no . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You wish to speak to the point of order.

The Chair blushes to say that had the Chair been paying closer attention to the words of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the Chair would have noted that we were entering into the partisanship part. As to the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, who has to cite custom as opposed to some of the specific Standing Orders, we have tried to maintain that in private members' public Bills we cannot say that these are government Bills or that they're opposition Bills; they're in fact Bills of a private member. So in that way the Chair as well as Cypress-Medicine Hat will recognize that.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, if you had been perhaps paying a little more attention, you would have heard one of the best speeches you would have heard so far.

I would say that I have made no disparaging remarks about the Liberals at all, Mr. Speaker. I have simply told the truth.

Debate Continued

DR. L. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, my point in my first few comments, before I was so rudely interrupted, was simply that having Albertans, not MLAs under the dome, be our ultimate judge is what's important for this government, is what's important

for this caucus, is what's important for all Albertans. In fact, we've come a long way in just the last few years to ensure that taxpayers are getting value for their dollars. Some examples of this are, for instance, the Financial Review Commission, the expanded role of the Auditor General, quarterly updates, performance measures, and more recently freedom of information. The government has answered the calls from Albertans for more accountability, and that's where we are. Albertans ask and we deliver.

In fact, all this progress towards accountability has been amazing, from my perspective. I got involved in politics three years ago because I was concerned in terms of what I saw happening in government and I wanted a change. I got involved because I felt we needed changes in the way government was managed, in the way government was open to the public. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I'm impressed – and I say that from a nonpartisan viewpoint – by what I see this government doing.

MR. N. TAYLOR: That's an oxymoron.

DR. L. TAYLOR: No, Mr. Speaker. There are no oxymorons here. The only oxymoron is an intelligent Liberal.

These advances, the way we are doing things, make the old way of doing things very obsolete, Mr. Speaker. The old and cumbersome ways of the opposition, their push for big committees is, quite frankly, useless. The time for a Public Accounts Committee has come and gone. We don't need it anymore. I speak, as I say, from two and a half years of sitting on that committee. It's time to change the way government does business. It's time to restructure government. One of the ways we can restructure government, as I've said, is to get rid of this useless committee. Perhaps in the past it served some usefulness. I'm not quite sure what it would be. But now with the Auditor General's scrutiny we've got the most transparent books in Canada as a government. We've got freedom of information. We don't need Public Accounts.

The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan simply wants to expand her committee and keep on wasting government resources, which seems to be the Liberal way to do things. This idea of meeting out of session: the cost of this would be prohibitive, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Section 23(i). The member once again is imputing motives, and I would once again request an apology. He has repeated in this House that my motives are to expand this committee for direct benefit, and I take strong exception to that, Mr. Speaker. The Bill clearly shows a downsizing of it. It explains the principle of accountability. For the member to continue to impute motive to the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is totally unacceptable. I gave him the benefit of the doubt on the ruling of the previous Speaker. I would like to see the Blues, because I do not believe that what was stated by the member indeed is accurate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, the hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I want to add to the point of order. I really feel sorry for the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat because apparently the Whip only supplied him with one speech to read, and consequently when he sits down, he gets up and reads the same speech over and over again. I was just wondering, Mr. Speaker, if you could inform the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat that according to *Beauchesne* 473 you're not allowed to read a speech. Therefore, if he thought for himself, he would probably be able to adjust and move around instead of going back to read what the Whip has ordered him to read.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat on the point of order, not on debate.

DR. L. TAYLOR: It's obvious, quite frankly, that sometimes you have to repeat things to slow learners. So if I occasionally repeat something, Mr. Speaker, it hopefully will help some of the slow learners on the other side to hear what's happening and hear what Albertans want.

Now to continue, I would say . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, we have a number of points of order. The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan indicated that she thought false and unavowed motives had been ascribed to her. The Chair didn't hear it as that but did hear the word ascribed to a party. We've talked about this in the previous 48 days, of casting motives or aspersions upon a whole group of people, which maybe begins to offend 23(j). You could say that it "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." We're all honourable members in here, and we ought to treat one another with that level of respect. Again, following the point of order that had been made by the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, we have the convention in this Assembly that private members' public Bills are not ascribed to one party or to the government, so some of the comments, then, begin to offend that custom. We would ask the hon. member to review his notes and perhaps drop some of those references that we have just mentioned that offend the custom in completing his speech on Bill 213.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I have no intent of offending custom. Certainly the Liberals may be but not customs.

Mr. Speaker, my point is . . .

4:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, we have just asked you on two occasions to try and bring the line of your speech into the customs of the House, and in so accepting it, you then proceed to do it yet again. Hon. member, please be careful with your speech and how you craft it and let us have no more abusive or insulting kinds of remarks ascribed to others.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I really don't think I was abusive or insulting, but I'll go on.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Apologize if you were.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I apologize if I was, certainly.

Debate Continued

DR. L. TAYLOR: I will continue to say, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 213 is wasteful duplication, and I hope that's not insulting to the Liberals or to any member of this House. You know, the

government has made itself very accountable, and we do not need this duplication. We do not need the wasting of resources that this duplication would take, the cost that this duplication would cause.

Even members on the opposite side would agree that the government has been very accountable. In fact, the wise Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is quoted as saying, "I think it is fair to say that the province of Alberta presently has the most transparent set of books in Canada." I thank him for that comment. He goes on to say, "possibly in North America."

AN HON. MEMBER: Is that the opposition?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Yes, that's the opposition that has said that about us.

. . . in terms of a consistent accounting on a consolidated basis and moving on a consistent basis to an accrual basis . . .

Not cruel, accrual basis

. . . and also for allowing the amortization of capital. There are some very positive elements in the budgeting [procedure].

That was said by the wise member opposite, Edmonton-Whitemud, March 21, 1995, page 726 in *Hansard*. Now, if he says that, why does that member opposite propose this useful, useless Bill?

On May 3, in the spring, he also said – and this is another direct quote – that the Government Accountability Act codifies – codifies, a good academic word – "what the Provincial Treasurer has made current practices now." Edmonton-Whitemud again.

It goes a long way, then, to ensuring consolidated budgeting. It goes a very long way to ensuring that the business plans are in place that set out benchmarks, performance indicators. It goes a long way in terms of transparency and ensuring, then, accountable government.

That is a member of the opposition again: Edmonton-Whitemud. I would assume that Edmonton-Whitemud will then have the courage of his convictions and stand up and vote against this useless duplication.

Now, the other Liberal Treasury critic, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, unfortunately – I can't say that; he's not here – also said in this House of the Government Accountability Act:

What I do appreciate and the reason I will be supporting this [government] Bill is that it does enshrine the current practice of financial reporting, business planning, and accountability into legislation.

That was Edmonton-Manning saying that, supporting the government Bill. I would assume that Edmonton-Manning would also have the courage of his convictions and stand up and vote against this useless duplication that is proposed in Bill 213 after these comments from *Hansard* have been made so clearly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning is rising on a point of order. Do you want to share that point of order with us?

Point of Order Clarification

MR. SEKULIC: Point of order, 23(h), (i), (j). Will I be recognized on that point of order? You can select any one. I think they've been listed enough times. I don't think courage has anything to do with this, Mr. Speaker, because what we do is we look and we discuss accountability and the elements of accountability. In my debate I think I thoroughly went through those elements. In fact, I cited the loss of 2.2 billion taxpayers' dollars. That's why I'm here. I was offended by that loss, so I came to get elected. I came to do something right here, and part of it was

to bring a greater level of accountability and transparency to this government. That doesn't mean sanitized or PR transparency. It means everything that Albertans are entitled to know about the expenditure of funds that they contribute through their taxes and that come in through oil and gas royalties. So it's not the courage that brought me here; it's the conviction to do what's right based on the elements of accountability.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Well, I personally didn't see any point of order there at all. It seemed like he was giving a speech as to why he was elected or something or perhaps pre-election practice.

I would remind him of his quote, Mr. Speaker, that does say . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, no. Whoa. On the point of order that we're talking about.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Oh, okay.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: An adroit use of a point of order to clarify the record. What we have is a dispute over facts, and I don't really think there's a point of order. However, the hon. member wanted to clarify the record and I guess managed to achieve that, in spite of the Chair not recognizing that it be a point of order.

We'd ask, then, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to continue his speech as quickly as he's able.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. I'm not sure what was clarified.

Debate Continued

DR. L. TAYLOR: I would remind him of his direct quote on our Government Accountability Act, which gives accountability, puts stuff out in the public, and it is this:

What I do appreciate and the reason I will be supporting this Bill is that it does enshrine the current practice . . . not a new practice but the current practice . . . of financial reporting, business planning, and accountability into legislation.

Note "the current practice." That's something that we are already doing, Mr. Speaker, as a government. It's not something new, not something that we've just introduced, but the current practice. A direct quote. That is why I'm sure this member will oppose this Bill. I think both Edmonton-Whitemud and Edmonton-Manning have had a term of tenure on this committee, and I think with their experience on the committee they will be even more likely to reject this Bill because they recognize from their quotes that the government is already accountable. We don't need more accountability.

The decision here for us today, Mr. Speaker, is: are we to maintain the status quo and the political empire for a committee chairman, or are we to restructure the way Albertans are governed? We don't need political empires. We don't need status quo. I for one don't believe in them. I want to get away from decisions about accountability being made here. I want the decisions about accountability to be made by Albertans out in the hustings of my constituency. That's where the decisions as to how accountable the government is need to be made, not wasting time coming in after session or wasting time during session, when we've got more important things to do, sitting on a committee that has no longer any use.

MR. BRUSEKER: That's why you're on it.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I would like to be off it, and I've spoken to the Whip on many occasions, but he won't take me off it.

5:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, would the member accept a question? *Beauchesne* 482.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is a legitimate request to interrupt a speaker and request that they entertain a question. You only have to say yes or no. You don't have to give reasons for either answer.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Yes, I certainly will attempt to answer any question that they might have.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, your question.

Debate Continued

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member: are you suggesting that you do not support a Public Accounts Committee?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Finally she's got the gist of my speech. I was accused of giving the same speech over and over. I see I didn't give it enough times, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, he'd indicated that he would answer the question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think he's answered the question. There's no way that he can be made to answer in the way that you might wish him to. Are you asking a second question? We haven't asked the hon. member if he's willing to entertain a second question. [interjection] The answer is no.

So if you would conclude your remarks, assuming you have enough time.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. I'll try and continue on with my eloquent speech. You know, it's the people of Alberta that are our stewards, the people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that we have given them the new and innovative tools to judge whether our government is accountable, to judge if we are spending their tax dollars wisely. This committee doesn't do that. This committee deals with the past. It deals with the books after the Auditor General has already examined them. He's already opened the books. He's already made his comments on the books. We don't need a committee to look at the past. We need people that are future looking, and that's what we are on this side. We are looking towards the future, programs that will benefit Albertans in the future. We are not interested in looking at the past and dwelling on the past.

The Financial Review Commission did review the government's financial position. It did review the government's reporting procedures and made recommendations as to what actions should be taken to improve the province's fiscal management. It made

recommendations on what actions should be taken to improve the reporting systems. Mr. Speaker, we've put those recommendations into practice. We've implemented the recommendations of the Financial Review Commission. In fact, Edmonton-Whitemud once again seems to agree with me. He said on February 28:

The other point I would make is that overall, I mean, there has been a significant improvement in the transparency of financial accounts in the province of Alberta, and I think you can relate that directly to many of the recommendations of the Financial Review Commission being adopted.

Now, I'm sure he wouldn't want to deny saying that, because it was recorded in *Hansard*, February 28, 1995, page 255. So once again, Mr. Speaker, the Treasury critic on the other side agrees with what the government is doing. He agrees. [Dr. Taylor's speaking time expired] Oh my. I don't suppose there's a chance for an extended time period if members opposite would give it. Could I have unanimous consent?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has asked for extended time. Does he have unanimous approval for an extended time?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, sir.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with some trepidation I follow the last speaker, who said at one point that this was going to be a speech, the most eloquent one we were going to hear in the House or something to that effect. So I'm mindful of that. I had not originally intended to speak, but what's happened is that we've taken a little bit of hyperbole and a little exaggeration, and as we've listened to speaker after speaker opposing this Bill, somehow the myth has grown and grown and grown. At some point someone has to say in this Assembly that the myth is simply that: it is nothing more than a myth.

Let me identify some of the myths that I think we've heard this afternoon. I think it was the Member for Olds-Didsbury who started out – and this is what I think he said – talking about this government being about openness and accountability. Then as speakers went on, the next thing I heard was somebody saying – and I think it was the last speaker – that this is the most transparent government in the history of Canada.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a world of difference between some positive changes. I think all Albertans can recognize that this government has made some positive changes, and certainly the Treasury critics have been quoted in acknowledging that in terms of reporting certain provincial financial transactions in some of the material that's published, it's more helpful than had been the case before. That's surely only part of the picture. Although financial data has to be more adequately, more clearly, and more completely presented, the other part of the equation is allowing for examination, allowing for questioning, allowing for a kind of scrutiny, and the people who prepare those statements having to defend them and having to be accountable. That's what's missing. So there's no conflict between the quotes that were read from my

colleagues who said, I think quite fairly and quite properly, that this government has made some headway and some direction in terms of greater accountability and the thrust of this Bill, which is that we can do a better job of taking those reports and those kinds of presentations and allowing a kind of questioning and a kind of scrutiny that doesn't currently exist.

It's interesting to me when I hear people say that this government is about openness and accountability, and then a little while later somebody is saying that this is the most open and accountable government ever. The reality is that that's clearly not the case. If you look past the Bill titles, if you look past some of the new legislation, and you look to the content to the way that the government conducts itself on a day-by-day basis, what you find is that we still have lots of secrets. The government may trumpet their Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, but let's recognize that not only are we virtually the last jurisdiction in Canada to have such a law but that the government has done some things that will cripple and impair the ability of that Act to do what it's supposed to do. We may have an effective law – and we actually have a very, very strong freedom of information law – but what the government gives with one hand, they've taken away with the other: a part-time commissioner with no open selection process, the highest fees in Canada, an up-front user fee which is five times higher than the highest fee charged anywhere else in Canada, and the fact that the government did absolutely nothing to publicize the commencement of freedom of information.

You know, what's interesting is that if this government were so convinced that it was about openness and accountability, why wouldn't they have gone out to Albertans in the same way they have with the lottery review, with health care accountability sessions? Take out an ad in the newspaper and say to Albertans: "This is something. You have a new information right that you didn't have before. This is what the Act's about, and this is how you can utilize it." We didn't see anything like that. In fact, of the 200 initial requests that members of this caucus submitted to the government in terms of getting information, virtually every one of those had been the subject of previous requests for information that hadn't been honoured, that hadn't been met. We will see as time goes on, but most of our requests have been met with an insistence that MLAs must pay an arbitrarily set fee to be able to access information.

5:10

If we think about that for a minute, it's fine for the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to say that we've got to get out from under the dome and that this government is committed to getting out and talking to Albertans. What he forgets is that we've all been elected by those very same Albertans not to spend our time necessarily running out in the field as much as it is to hold this government accountable, to scrutinize what the government does with taxpayer dollars in this Chamber and through the committees that are part of this Chamber. I think that any government that holds up standing policy committees, manned only by government members, any government that has a chairman of a Standing Committee on Law and Regulations but refers no regulation to it to scrutinize and is proud of the fact they've never met makes an absolute sham, a mockery of this claim to greater openness and accountability. I think that Albertans can see through that.

You know, in terms of regulations, when this government decided that they wanted to streamline regulations, they didn't go to an all-party committee that would have been really aggressive

in terms of reducing the scope of executive decision-making. What they wanted to do was keep it in-house, and that's exactly what happened. So you have government control, people selected by the government giving input in terms of cutting back on regulation. This misses the point completely that's been made by the mover and sponsor of this Bill. The Public Accounts Committee is an all-party committee, and that ensures that there is going to be genuine openness and genuine accountability in a way that can never happen with committees staffed or manned only by government MLAs.

There is a question in terms of a total waste of taxpayer money. Notwithstanding the fact that the mover of this Bill has stressed that the cost is an exceedingly modest \$8,000, notwithstanding the fact that I expect members of the opposition are even more aggressive than government members in terms of trying to spare taxpayers' expense, we continue to have this myth repeated and repeated, that the mover and members on this side want to spend more taxpayer dollars. It seems to me that the ultimate insult is that a government that has cost Albertans over \$2.2 billion in lousy, failed, shortsighted so-called investments would have members in this House challenge an \$8,000 expenditure and some suggestions to make a committee more effective that provides genuine oversight.

I think that the myths that have been mentioned will be seen by Albertans who take the time to read *Hansard* as myths. I think that if government members were genuinely interested in earning the right to the most open and accountable government in Canada, they would embrace this Bill in a minute. This provides them with an opportunity to take a very positive suggestion from the mover of this Bill and do something which does ensure some genuine accountability.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to let someone else have a turn. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak on this profound piece of legislation on this the very first day of our recommencement after the summer recess. I was interested and somewhat concerned and astounded to hear some of the argument and the debate as it progressed today, for criticism in some fashion to be levied at the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud that he would say something nice about the Provincial Treasurer's conduct and that would allow hon. members to incorporate into their speeches that there is no room for improvement in this province.

You know, this particular piece of legislation, it is true, to a certain extent enshrines already existing government policy, but unlike the Member for Olds-Didsbury I welcome that further codification. If the Member for Olds-Didsbury felt so strongly that we should never codify government policy, why didn't he stand up and pontificate to that degree, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier introduced Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Act? The Treasurer and the Premier had spent the entire scrum period outside of this Legislative Assembly telling the press that we already do these things but that we're going to put it in legislative form for future succeeding governments so that they won't be tempted to stray.

So I tell the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury that if he votes in favour of Bill 213, he may yet in his political career find himself

in the position where he could chair this particular committee. I want to encourage him and give him something to look forward to in his political career.

Are we an open and accountable government, as the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat says? Well, let other people speak in the Legislative Assembly for a moment.

The prominent Alberta paper, the *Edmonton Journal*, in their article recently on the 7th of October, Mr. Speaker, had this to say about open government. They were talking about the Liberal opposition filing 200 questions looking for information. They said:

The questions are interesting in another respect. They relate to public issues – some of them pressing – about which the government previously had no impulse to be forthcoming.

While I pause to deliberate on the condemnation of those words, “no impulse to be forthcoming,” I’ll move that we adjourn debate on this Bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray has moved that we now adjourn debate. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

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

