

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, February 22, 1996 1:30 p.m.
Date: 96/02/22
 [The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank You for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves.

We ask You to ensure to us Your guidance and the will to follow it.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table with the Assembly today a petition signed by a number of very concerned Albertans who are asking the Legislative Assembly to urge the government

to refuse to implement the proposed health care database on the grounds that the security of the personal information contained in this data may be at risk, and this peril outweighs any benefit from the centralization of the information.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were two petitions introduced the other day, one dealing with closure of the Alberta Place office of Family and Social Services. The other one dealt with freedom of information fees. I'd ask that both of those petitions be read and received at this time.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to ensure that the Alberta Place District Office of Family and Social Services will not be closed as an SFI office until alternative service delivery points are established and accessible to all residents of downtown Calgary.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to reduce the \$25.00 application fee to access government records, to be more in line with the other provinces, as legislated under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act regulations.

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

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

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I hereby submit the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the Third Session of the 23rd Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice that I will rise again at the appropriate time to present a Standing Order 40 motion which reads as follows: "Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize that February is Black History Month in Alberta."

Thank you.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give notice that immediately after question period I will seek unanimous consent under Standing Order 40 to propose the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize the efforts of the athletes, organizers, and volunteers involved in the 1996 Alberta Winter Games, being held in Lethbridge, Crownsnest Pass, and West Castle from February 22 to February 25, 1996.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with this government's openness and accountability to the residents of Alberta once again, I'm filing with the Legislature a response to Motion 225 and a response to Motion 226.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table with the Assembly this afternoon six copies of the answer to Written Question 234, requested by the Member for Edmonton-Manning and accepted on October 18, 1995.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. With your permission and the permission of the minister for economic development I would like to table copies of two letters directed to the chairman of the board of trustees of Grande Yellowhead school division and to the Premier of this province. Both indicate the opinion of about 750 residents of Edson that they will refuse to pay the bus transportation fee that has been levied.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with the thorough research that this caucus does, I'd like to table four copies of a document which points out a number of examples, just a small number of the large number of examples that are there, that relate directly to crimes as a result of VLT addiction.

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

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table the annual report for Athabasca University for the year 1994-95 and the annual report for the Students Finance Board for the year 1995. Copies have been distributed to all MLAs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your kind permission I'd like to table, with the consent of the two school boards in Fort McMurray, Alberta, the results of a professional study that they had commissioned to reflect the disparate costs between Fort McMurray and other southern-based cities in Alberta. The indicated finding of this report is that there is a 15 percent premium charged to carry on business and live in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

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

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table four copies of a letter from the Patients' Council of Alberta Hospital Edmonton to the Provincial Mental Health Board communicating their concerns about patient care and treatment at the hospital within the Edmonton region.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table several copies of a brochure that has been distributed by the Friends of the Leduc Hospital. The brochure is titled *Do You Want to Be a Second-Class Patient in Your Own Community Hospital?* Of course it refers to the planned privatization and sale of the Leduc hospital to the Hotel de Health group. I table these for the Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly 54 of Leduc's brightest and most enthusiastic grade 6 students from Willow Park school. They are accompanied this afternoon by their teachers Mrs. Sandy and Mr. Howard. Mrs. Leitch, Mr. DeWit, and Mrs. Pyrch have graciously offered to assist this afternoon with the class and escort them to watch the very professional behaviour of the Legislature this afternoon. So I ask you all to give them a very warm welcome.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, today it is my pleasure to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 54 students from the Rimbeley elementary school. For those of the Assembly not familiar with Rimbeley and the schools there, it is a very fine town in the western end of the Ponoka-Rimbeley constituency. The students are accompanied by teachers and group leaders Ms Valerie Warren, Mr. John Toporowski, Mr. Walter Johnson and parents and helpers Mrs. Eileen Bokstrom, Mrs. Michawn Giesbrecht, Mrs. Joann Frayn, Mrs. Laurie McElroy, Mrs. Joanne Reaugh, Mrs. Leslie Kriz, Mr. John Roberts, Ms Gail McFarlane, Mr. Lage Johnson, Mr. Lawrence Wright, Mrs. Gayle Troitsky, Mrs. Dianne Kushniryk, and Mrs. Carmele Schneider. They are seated in the public gallery, and I think perhaps some of the students may be over in the members' gallery. I might have those two reversed; I'm sorry. I would request that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first introduction is Scott Brimacombe. Scott is shadowing me today. He's a grade 12 student at Harry Ainlay composite. He's a resident of Edmonton-Rutherford. Scott is in the public gallery in the first row. If you could stand and get the recognition of this House.

My second one, Mr. Speaker – and I hope I'm not stealing somebody's thunder over here. In the members' gallery is a newly elected alderman, Brent Maitson, who represents ward 5, the area I live in. Brent, if you will stand and take the applause of this House.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I rise to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a young woman who is in the public gallery this afternoon. She's a first-year university student. You know her because last year in your chambers you awarded her an award to her for academic excellence. I'd ask that Rose Yewchuk rise and receive the welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**
Premier's Work Schedule

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, in April of 1994 a Calgary youth court judge boycotted his courtroom over a pay dispute and instead stayed in his office working. When asked about the judge's actions, the Premier said, and I quote: anyone who doesn't come to work and still expects to be paid should be fired. He went on to say: if it was up to me, I would fire him. To the Premier: will he explain to this House and to the people of Alberta why he shouldn't get the same treatment as he has suggested for this judge?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought I'd give Frank a break.

MR. MITCHELL: He took a break yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

Is it not a Premier's job to be accountable to the people of this province and to answer questions even if he doesn't happen to like them, Mr. Speaker?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was at work yesterday. I wasn't in the Legislative Assembly. I attended caucus; that is, my caucus. I attended at least three meetings in my office. Again, I just wanted to give Frank a break.

MR. MITCHELL: He didn't feel like coming to the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. How many Albertans don't have to show up for work just because they don't happen to feel like it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition is calling the kettle black. I see that there are two members at least who are not here in his caucus, three members as a matter of fact. Is the hon. leader going to fire them?

Speaker's Ruling
Referring to the Absence of Members

THE SPEAKER: All hon. members should recall that our practices and procedures and rules in this Assembly make it quite clear that there are not to be comments on the presence or absence of any member on either side. So please try to follow this practice more strictly. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ethics Commissioner's Report

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Section 11 of the Conflicts of Interest Act states that a member shall file an amending disclosure statement within 30 days. Section 12 of that same Act requires disclosure of all assets and liabilities of a member and the member's spouse. Section 18 of that same Act says that failure to do either one of those two things constitutes a breach of the Act. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier please confirm the findings of the Ethics Commissioner that the Premier breached section 11 of the Act by failing to file in the required time?

Speaker's Ruling Legal Opinions

THE SPEAKER: This is akin to asking the Premier to give a legal opinion on the findings of the Ethics Commissioner, and the Premier or any other member of cabinet is not to be asked legal opinions about anything.

MR. BRUSEKER: I'm asking questions about a report, Mr. Speaker, a report that has been tabled in the House.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair understands that the hon. member is asking questions about a report. The Chair also understands the legal implications of the report, and that is in the nature of a legal opinion, hon. member.

Ethics Commissioner's Report (continued)

MR. BRUSEKER: My supplementary question to the Premier then: will the Premier agree with the findings of the conflict of interest commissioner's report that there was a breach of sections 11 and 12 of the Act, as reported in the report? Does he agree with them?

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Chair has been probably too lax in allowing questions that ask for opinions and comments. The purpose of question period is to ask about specific policies of government and the administration of the affairs of this province. It's not to ask about opinions or comments on various subjects of the day.

Ethics Commissioner's Report (continued)

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Speaker, then is it the policy of the government to table a paper in the Legislature and not debate it and bring it forth in the Legislature for discussion in the Legislative Assembly?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take it that question was directed to you. With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-North West did not address the question to me. He was looking directly at you, so perhaps you would like to answer.

Speaker's Ruling Addressing the Chair

THE SPEAKER: The Chair is not going to be critical of the hon. Member for Calgary-North West for looking at the Chair when asking a question, because questions are to be put through the

Chair. The Chair respects the way in which the hon. Member for Calgary-North West asks questions. The Chair did hear at least the preface of the question: is it government policy for something to happen? Then the Chair was distracted by other noise and didn't hear the rest of the question. Perhaps the Premier was also unable to hear the rest of that question. So the Chair would give the hon. member the chance to re-ask the question.

Ethics Commissioner's Report (continued)

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question was: is it government policy then – and this question is directed to the Premier – to have a report tabled in the Legislature, which was tabled by the Chair, which is not then debated in the Legislative Assembly? The report tabled specifically is the report from the Ethics Commissioner.

MR. KLEIN: With all due respect – and I mean this quite seriously – I'll defer to the Government House Leader, because this is a point of legislative procedure.

1:50

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's hard to hear when the opposition keeps popping up like preset cuckoo clocks over there.

It's very clear that this is a very unclear question: a paper being delivered to the Legislature. Sometimes that is considered by the Legislature; sometimes it is not. [interjections] So when you have as vague a question as that . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order please.

MR. N. TAYLOR: He's insulting the legal profession.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sure the legal profession can look after itself, hon. member.

The Chair would like to be able to hear what the hon. Government House Leader is saying.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again. It's very clear that when a question is that unclear and vague, asking what happens when a piece of paper comes into this House, what the policy of the government is – well, different types of papers are delivered all the time under different types of headings and for different purposes. So, yes, sometimes those are considered in detail. Sometimes they're tabled for information. It's a very vague question. I've tried to be as specific as I could.

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

Government Aircraft

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This coming weekend the city of Lethbridge and southwestern Alberta are hosts to the Alberta Winter Games. The official opening ceremony of the games is at 7 p.m. tonight, two hours after the end of the Budget Address. When I found out that the Premier was attending to open the games, I approached his office to ask permission to join him on the government plane taking him to the opening. This was last week. I was given a seat. On Tuesday of this week my seat was canceled. My question to the Premier is: could you tell me why it was okay last week for me to share your flight and this week it is not?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't make up the manifest. If the hon. member would care to take it up with me after question period and if there is a seat – I'll have my office check on it right now. As far as I am concerned, this hon. member – and he is an honourable member; he's one of the few over there – is welcome to ride along.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, last week when I asked, they said that there were three extra seats. Would the Premier tell me who joined this taxpayer-funded flight so that I had to be bumped?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I honestly don't know. I don't make up the manifest. As I say, my office can hear right now. If there's a seat available, we'll get notification to the hon. member. If there is a seat available, he can come along. He's perfectly welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

The hon. Member for Vegreville-Viking.

Telehealth Technology

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New government direction in health has created new partnerships, including government, RHAs, and the private sector. As a result a new computer linkup between the University of Alberta hospital and the hospital in Two Hills, located in the Lakeland region, will allow patients to receive improved medical care in spite of the great distance. Can the Minister of Health provide the House with some details of this program?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the program that the hon. member is referring to is the Telehealth opening that occurred at the university on Tuesday of this week. This really is an exciting occasion in technological advancement in the delivery of health services in this province. It was brought about by the initiative of a rural regional health authority, Lakeland, recognizing the needs of their patients and the distances that they have to travel and the challenges that their medical professionals feel in that area trying to service those needs. Hughes Aircraft of Canada has made a very generous contribution to the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine at the university, and the partnership between Hughes, the university health sciences faculties, and the Lakeland regional health authority has allowed this.

Mr. Speaker, Telehealth is somewhat different than telemedicine, which we often hear about. It describes the delivery of services such as educational as well as medical, and it uses the interactive technology of video, audio, and computer. So this is a real advancement, and I applaud the Lakeland regional health authority for their initiative and thank the other partners for taking part in this.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will this program increase accessibility for patients in rural areas?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, to explain this program, I believe it was launched by the Lakeland region because of some heart/stroke patients that they had in their area that were facing distances traveling to come back to see specialists and so on. What it will do for them is enable them to hook up through either

video or computer linkages to have their conditions monitored by specialists here and their family physicians in their area.

I think an example might be useful, Mr. Speaker. If you just took, for example, a patient in Two Hills who has an x-ray that needs to be looked at by a specialist in Edmonton, this technology has the type of significant detail in it that that can be placed on a screen and come up on a computer and enable that interaction between the specialist and the family physician and consequently save the patient the need to travel and also offer the opportunity for immediate diagnosis or opportunity for treatment.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will this partnership encourage and attract more physicians to practise in rural Alberta?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, about a month or six weeks ago I had an opportunity to talk with the medical students at the University of Alberta. I asked them at that time what the greatest barrier was for them in looking at practising in rural communities. Most of the input that I received back was on isolation and the lack of opportunity to work with their peers. I believe that rural physicians will feel more confident in practising in remote areas having this linkage. They will have the support from specialists. They will also have additional educational opportunities in those communities because those educational opportunities can be reached this way as well. It goes further than just linkages in Canada, in fact, and can be expanded to Japan and other countries. So this is a very significant advancement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Hospital Transfers

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that the future looks bright for access to tertiary care for rural Albertans. At this moment, though, it's still the pits, if I may call it that. Recently one of my constituents received a bill for \$1,761.97 for a transfer from a hospital in Hinton to a hospital in Edmonton. A doctor had found it necessary to transfer her. Upon my advice my constituent sent the bill to the Minister of Health, who was very gracious and passed it on to the RHA for payment. I really appreciated that. By the way, I have copies of the letter that my constituent wrote to the minister. I'd like to table those. I have some questions for the Minister of Health, if I may. First of all, is it generally the policy of this government to have rural Albertans pay out of their own pocket for medically necessary transfers between hospitals?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, no, it is not. The policies of government on transfer are this. The regional health authorities are funded in their budgets for interfacility transfers. Many Albertans, in fact most Albertans, do carry supplementary health insurance which covers ambulance. This has been the practice for years in this province. What we are finding, though, and what we recognize would be a concern is that under regionalization and in the new way actually of being able to deliver services, we do not have as many people physically admitted into hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, we have a committee working right now that is comprised of people from the regional health authorities, from emergency services, whether they are municipal or private or association-type services. That committee is headed up by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler. The hon. Member for Lac La

Biche-St. Paul, who is the chairman of the ambulance appeal board, is also sitting on that committee. They will be taking this information, also the extensive report that was done for this province about three years ago, and bringing forward a policy on how to deal with these issues.

2:00

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, considering the confused state at the moment and the many reports that have already been done, can the minister hold out any hope of a specific date by which this study will be completed and a policy will be in place?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that things have not changed in ambulance services, so there should not be a confused state. Services are provided right now as they always have been. Interfacility transfers are funded by the regional health authorities. Albertans should be encouraged to carry private insurance for ambulance costs, because as you know, accidents will happen, highways and so on, and these are not a part of that. However, it is important, as the hon. member has noted, that we review our ambulance services and make sure that they are contemporary. I expect the first information from that report probably in late March.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In the meantime, then, Madam Minister, is it clearly the policy of your government that rural Albertans send their bills for transfers to you personally?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question from the hon. member, and I appreciate the fact that the hon. member did contact me when he had a constituent who had difficulty with a situation. Certainly it is my preference that I do not review all of the bills, but it is also my policy that when any member of this Legislature brings forward a health concern from a constituent, I work with that hon. member to try and resolve that, and I will continue that practice.

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

Special Places 2000

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I met not only with groups in my constituency who have nominated major portions of the Bow-Crow forest under the Special Places 2000 program, but I have also met with a vibrant forestry industry which feels threatened that these multiple nominations will interfere with not only their already agreed to annual allowable cuts but their future quotas. My question to the Minister of Environmental Protection: can the minister guarantee that these businesses will be able to carry out their present activities without restriction because of the multiple nominations that were presented?

MR. LUND: We've had a lot of nominations under the special places program. As a matter of fact, in the Bow-Crow forest reserve there is just a very small part that is not currently under a nomination. So we found it necessary that we put in place a committee that could look at the area, at the nomination, and come up with some interim measures that would satisfy the industry yet satisfy the nomination. So, Mr. Speaker, the short

of it is that the industries will be able to operate. The message is getting out there immediately so that they can continue to harvest in the areas that were allocated.

MR. COUTTS: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: then could the minister please identify what kind of interim measures could be applied?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the area will be looked at, and if there is an area that was identified in the past as being a very high candidate for a designation under special places, then that area would be looked at as far as a low-impact operation. There would be possibly some restrictions on how operations could proceed within that area.

The areas outside of the area that's designated as having some special treatment would be business as usual. The interim measures are just that; they're interim. The process would then continue through the provincial committee toward a designation.

MR. COUTTS: In view of that, Mr. Speaker, it would sound like there is a process that must be worked. How will that process then work in detail, Mr. Minister?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the committee looks at the nomination immediately. They then look at the sites that possibly in the past had potential to be designated as, say, an ecological reserve, just as an example. The committee would put in interim measures on that part of the nomination, and it would then be business as usual until the provincial committee has had an opportunity to examine the larger nomination.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

Community Health Services

MR. KIRKLAND: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My question this afternoon is to the hon. Minister of Health. Madam Minister, your government has committed \$2.5 million to cover the cost of supplemental food products for home IV therapy patients. As with the case of a Beaumont constituent, some patients are left to pay the full cost of the antibiotic drugs which must be administered in conjunction with these food supplement therapies. While some physicians have the luxury of actually keeping their patients in hospital to avoid the cost, other patients, such as my constituent in Beaumont, have been put in an onerous financial position by having to pay for the antibiotics for their home therapies. In light of the requirement to treat patients with IV food supplement and antibiotics simultaneously, why is the cost of the food supplement covered but not the cost of the antibiotics?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should reflect back to the discussion when we announced the enhancement of community programming. The food supplements that are used in these cases are not an insured item, as I understand it, under the Blue Cross program, whereas most drugs are. Certainly that was our desire, to ensure that people did have the opportunity to have that new therapy. It's really not a new therapy, but the ability to have it in your home surrounding is newer. We wanted to ensure that people could go back and live in their communities. So we were really covering an area that is not covered under insurance.

What we are expecting, hon. member, is that a number of these areas will be looked at as we move to more community services

delivery. The hon. member would know that in the first year of restructuring, we committed 30 million additional dollars to community, the second year \$40 million, and of course later today we'll be talking about the budget year next year.

Mr. Speaker, that is primarily the reason for singling out those nutritional products themselves. They are not, as I understand it, covered on a drug list. They are not drugs.

MR. KIRKLAND: Madam Minister, in light of your push to capture the cost-effective delivery of medical services in the community, it would seem to me that we certainly can do that by paying for that supplement. Why do we not follow through with the pledge to move medical services to the community by paying for that supplement or that antibiotic?

2:10

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we are paying for the supplement. What we are not paying for is the drug that the hon. member is mentioning.

What we do do, Mr. Speaker, is contribute as a government, as you know, to two programs that cover drugs through Blue Cross. The seniors' program, which has no premium, has a co-pay, and seniors take advantage of that program. We have a nongroup program which is subsidized for people who do not have the opportunity to have an employer-based program, for those who are self-employed and so on.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a significant contribution to the people of this province through the drug programs that we do provide for people. The nongroup program is subsidized by this government. I'm sure we'll talk more about that in the days of my estimates.

MR. KIRKLAND: Madam Minister, there is a financial barrier to discharge, as I indicated in my opening comments. I would ask the minister why we wouldn't remove that barrier.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I believe that I have answered the question in the first two answers. The barriers that are there for any of us to live at home are there. We do contribute to the drug program through two significant programs. If the person is a senior or if the person is in a nongroup program, those are subsidized by this government and by the people of this province. So I'm not sure whether the hon. member is suggesting that we have a drug program that covers everyone's medications in the province at no cost or where we draw the line. But we do have a drug program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Protection of Persons in Care Act

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Tuesday I asked the ministers of Community Development, Health, and Municipal Affairs questions related to their consultation process respecting the implementation of Bill 211, the Protection of Persons in Care Act. Because other departments are involved, I wish to direct my first question to the Minister of Family and Social Services in a similar vein. Will the minister commit to a consultation process with the boards and with the staff and administration of all facilities, like the Michener Centre, which are funded by his department whereby the consultation to develop guidelines and regulations occurs before the implementation of the Act?

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

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have asked my department officials to review this legislation and its potential impact on department-funded services and facilities. As the member is aware, the department at this time has very high standards for agencies and organizations that are funded. My department officials are reviewing this legislation to see how it fits together with our current standards and monitoring processes that are in place.

Of course it has always been the policy of this department to provide the best quality of services, no doubt in North America, for persons with disabilities. We will continue that. In fact, with the new reforms in place redesigning the delivery systems to persons with disabilities, which includes facilities, they will be, no doubt, the highest in North America. We are spending more dollars, more human resources to redesign the system.

MR. TANNAS: My first supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Justice. What consultation process does the minister have in place regarding the implementation of Bill 211?

MR. EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, Bill 211 provides that there is a duty to report instances of abuse. That's either to a government department, a government minister, or, in substantial situations, to law enforcement agencies. So staff from my department are going to be in contact with our chiefs of police throughout the province to ensure that they are aware of the provisions of the Act and how it might impact them in terms of law enforcement.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Family and Social Services: in this department's review of the Act, will they include provision for consultation with the staff, administration, and boards of the various institutions funded by his department?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, at this time I cannot specifically commit that. As you are aware, any of the reforms that have come forward, the redesign of the whole welfare reforms in Alberta, which includes persons with disabilities, have always involved the clientele, interest groups, the frontline workers, the managers, executive staff in my department and other departments in relation to redesigning of delivery systems and programs.

Video Lottery Terminals

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, this government likes to heap praise on the cash cows that slot machines have become. Unfortunately, this government conveniently overlooks the negatives, such as family breakups, bankruptcy, addiction, related crime. I tabled in the House a document outlining a number of crimes directly related to the slot machines. Two examples: an Edmonton woman sentenced to 10 months for stealing over \$19,000 to maintain her VLT habit, in July another Edmonton woman sentenced to 30 months for stealing over \$178,000 to feed her addiction. My question to the minister responsible for gambling: has the government determined the cost to taxpayers as a result of the increase in gambling-related crime?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, crime is crime. I'm sure that very shortly, when the budgets come down, you can read the amount of money this government puts into the Department of Justice. As I say, crime is crime. There are people that for one reason or another in their lifestyles may defraud bank accounts. They may do any number of things that are illegal. When they break the law, they break the law. If you want to take any form of lifestyle that goes out of control by overindulgence or by addictiveness, you will find crime.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, where is Ken when you need him?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure we can get one of the pages to deliver a seating plan to the hon. member.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I was snookered.

My first supplementary: why doesn't the minister just do the honourable thing, do right for Albertans and ban these machines?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we had an extensive debate yesterday and the day before on a Bill brought in by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and it was defeated in this Assembly.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary to the Justice minister: how does the top dog of the justice system condone slot machines that clearly contribute to increased crime?

MR. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, that question has nothing whatsoever to do with the responsibility of the Minister of Justice.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Preventive Medicine

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that I represent a portion of the area serviced by the Headwaters regional health authority, one which was instrumental in a pilot regionalization project in the mid-1980s, so it isn't a surprise that they implemented a program called Action for Health. My question to the Minister of Health: would you share with our colleagues in the House some of the details of this program, Action for Health?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the program that the hon. member is speaking about is one that involves a lot of areas of health promotion and prevention. We've recognized that we have to take action to prevent disease, illness, accidents that can cause injuries. The Headwaters health authority is one of the groups who have taken action in their communities by identifying some areas of concern and looking at how we can prevent these things.

I'll give you an example that is general. If you have an intersection in a community where there are a lot of accidents, should you just simply make sure you have a hospital to treat the people who are injured there, or should you look at a way to change that intersection to prevent the accidents? This is what Action for Health is really about, and a lot of the communities in our province are taking action in their communities to prevent

illness, to prevent injury and disease as much as they can. I applaud the Headwaters group for their initiative.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: are there any other regional health authorities in the province that are taking a proactive stance in implementing similar programs?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of regions that are taking part in this program, and I know that a number of members in this Assembly on both sides of the House would be interested in knowing what those programs are. The regional health authorities have just submitted their business plans to me, and as part of the business plans some of those initiatives will be included. Beyond that, I believe this is a subject that is of enough interest and importance to the members in this Assembly that I will endeavour to table in the Legislature a copy of the variety of initiatives that have been taken across this province in this program.

The other thing that's important about this program is that there is an evaluation process that is also occurring with the program where the regional health authorities will take your initiatives and put them out. They will do an evaluation and, if they are working, continue; if they are not, correct them. I think it is a very important initiative, so, Mr. Speaker, I'll bring that information to the House.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of interest to me and I know to members opposite: will the minister be able to tell us if there'll be additional costs to implementing this program?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, in many cases there are not additional costs. It's a matter of how you target your resources. However, a year ago we did provide to the regions over \$7 million, not just generally distributed but moneys that they could apply for if they had specific initiatives on health promotion, prevention activities. A number of the regions have applied and been successful, and there are others who are still bringing that forward. So we felt it was important enough as a government to put additional funds in ourselves, in addition to what they had. Many of the regions are looking at this as an important part of their program, and they are allocating resources to it.

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

Emergency Hospital Services

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past month we have seen the quality of health care in our city drop dramatically. Last week Edmonton hospitals issued 31 - 31 that is - red alerts to warn ambulances that they simply cannot bring their patients to that hospital, because they are too busy. Only yesterday one of our hospitals, the Misericordia, had a 24-hour - a record 24-hour - red alert. My questions are to the minister responsible for health in this province. In view of the fact that doctors, nurses, health care workers, and patients all agree that the sole reason for these delays is the government's cuts in health care, when is the

minister going to take responsibility for this and do something about it?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am somewhat surprised that a former alderman of the city of Edmonton would not understand the system of red alert. The hon. member, I'm sure, has been involved with enough city hospitals in the past and should now understand that a red alert system is a system that ensures – ensures – that patients are taken to a facility where they can be treated.

Mr. Speaker, it is true that at the Grey Nuns hospital last week, I believe it was, there was an uncommon number of persons needing services. That was due to a very severe flu that is going around and people slipping on ice that was prevalent.

Hon. members should consider ourselves very fortunate in this city that we have a number of hospitals that are prepared to have patients come into them and to be treated. To suggest that because there is a red alert at one hospital there is not treatment available does a great disservice to the caregivers in this city. What the members should be doing is applauding the system that they have in place that tells people that there is not room there and that the patient should be taken somewhere else. If the hon. member had any knowledge of emergency services – and I do believe his past experience should have given him some of that – he would understand that many major cities in the world have a computerized system that immediately tells an ambulance person whether a hospital will admit, treat, or receive and transfer and, in fact, in some countries tells them whether they will accept male or female patients.

Mr. Speaker, this is a system that makes sure that we have emergency services for people and that they do not have to run around in circles.

MR. WHITE: Judging from the response to the question, my supplementary question is simply this: is the minister, then, saying that the red alerts experienced in the last week in this city are desirable and acceptable?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think that anything in my answer suggested that they are. But they do give an opportunity for the regional health authority to review their resource allocation, to review the number of service providers they have and, when these things happen, as they will on occasion, particularly on weekends, to make absolutely sure that they can transfer people to the appropriate facility.

They are not acceptable. The regional health authority has not suggested they are acceptable. I'm sure that the reason the hon. member knows about this is because they have publicly discussed this. If he has been reading that discussion, he would know that they are addressing this and looking at how they can minimize the number of red alerts there are.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, following again specifically from the answers just given, is it not the minister's understanding, as it is all RHAs, that the response of hospitals to red alerts is simply related to a bottom line which is controlled by the minister? When are you going to do something about that, Madam Minister?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, what it really means is that the regional health authorities, who have been given the responsibility for delivery of health services in this province, in this case the Capital health authority, are taking their responsibilities very

seriously, and they are responding by the fact that if there is a red alert at a hospital, the system knows that you do not take a patient there. You take them to another place where they can be treated.

Mr. Speaker, the regional health authority in this city has commented publicly on this. They have made the commitment to address this, to reduce the number. I ask the hon. member to perhaps sit down with the regional health authority so that he has some understanding and could perhaps work proactively and productively with them in this area.

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

Confidentiality of Medical Records

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard the minister responsible for protection of privacy indicate to us that he was already acting to protect the confidentiality of all records about the health of individual Albertans. Now, this is odd since this very same minister refused Liberal amendments, first in 1994 and again in 1995, to do that very thing. Section 3(a), section 5(i) in the privacy Act as they now stand mean that the privacy law does not even apply to personal health information. My question to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services: why has this minister refused to make records under, firstly, the Hospitals Act and, secondly, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act subject to our privacy law?

2:30

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, the legislation already exists for that in the other Acts.

MR. DICKSON: My supplementary question is: since we only have one genuine privacy Act that does the job of protecting the privacy of Albertans, when will this minister introduce legislation to make the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act and the Hospitals Act records subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act?

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, the member full well knows that the other Acts come into place if they've already been there, and they're the ones that are under control of it now. The Act says so. I don't have the section right here, but it's within the Act.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you. My final supplemental question to the minister in whom we repose our trust to protect our privacy would be this: what steps will he take in this legislative session to make sure that we don't see more problems like we heard yesterday, where workers' compensation personal information is being shared between health agencies and agencies like the Workers' Compensation Board?

MR. FISCHER: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, those are covered under the other Acts, and those Acts supersede the health Act and the Workers' Compensation Act, and we abide by those Acts.

I want to explain that we are as the department of public works working with the new technology and with our new Act in training programs with our people right across the departments. Also, I think I mentioned yesterday that this is a new Act, and there is new technology coming out all the time. There have to be a lot of growing pains that come with it. We do have the

legislation in place now and the interpretation of it. We've heard of cases of giving out information that shouldn't be given out, and we've heard the other side, that information was given out too freely. I know that the members from the opposition are wanting a lot of information out freely. That has to go through the process before we can give out that information.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health wishes to augment.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, for the hon. member opposite's information I would simply offer, endeavour to give him a copy of the sections of the Act that protect the privacy. There are some 29 pieces of legislation that are under the Ministry of Health, and a number of those, including the Hospitals Act, have very stringent rules of confidentiality and privacy. The hon. minister has pointed out very clearly that it needs some transition time to see whether any of those can be there, but I can assure him that it is there under protection and that if there is a breach or a problem with that, that is dealt with through those Acts today.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Kindergarten Age Restrictions

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents, Amanda Babalola, has been removed from her ECS class. She is a four-year-old girl who the Calgary board of education admitted into their ECS program even though she was under age. In February, after spending five months in her ECS class, Amanda was asked to leave by the board.

I have met with Amanda, and she has told me that she would really like to stay in her ECS class. Amanda's principal also reports that she is doing well in school. However, the board maintains that keeping her in her class would be going against the regulation. Amanda is very upset that she may have to withdraw from her ECS class, and it is certainly causing hardship for her family. Apparently, neither the parents nor Amanda made any error, because they did present Amanda's birth certificate at registration time.

Mr. Speaker, it is my opinion that if the board violated their own regulations in admitting Amanda in the first place, they should at least be flexible in reaching an acceptable compromise to the situation. I fail to see any good coming out of the board's decision. The board will not be saving any money by removing Amanda from her class, because in fact it will cost them more money, seeing as they would have to refund her parents.

I urge the Calgary board to do the right thing and let Amanda stay in her class. A little girl should not have to pay for the mistakes of the bureaucracy.

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

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans suffering from psychiatric illness have never had a fair share of the health care dollar. Once again they are being deprived of their basic rights.

I share excerpts from a letter sent to the Provincial Mental Health Board from the patients' council of Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

As residents of [Alberta Hospital Edmonton], we have normal needs as everyone else within the community and desire to live a normal life like everyone else. This means: adequate and affordable housing, social, medical, mental and spiritual services as we need them, adequate income to sustain us in a reasonable lifestyle (an income that is not below the poverty level), recreation and meaningful work; in short, we desire to live a life as is considered normal in the community . . .

While many of us are able to function quite well in the community with the appropriate support services, some of us have a harder time of it. This group is not able to speak for itself very well and let their needs be known, nor are they able to access the system very easily and [be comfortable at it] . . .

We wonder what is wrong with our living at [Alberta Hospital Edmonton]. What is the rush to move us out? As long as there are not the services available to provide the appropriate support for us in the community, we plead with you not to change the number of beds available in [Alberta Hospital Edmonton] until the various support structures are available for us in the community. We fear that we are being rushed into the community before these support structures are in place . . .

When the changes in the delivery of mental health services were begun to be implemented, we were assured by the administration of [Alberta Hospital Edmonton] that the funds would not be taken from resident care and treatment areas, but from the administrative side. We felt reassured and encouraged by this. [But] we observe that the Provincial Mental Health Board seems to have developed a massive administrative structure . . . We question [what is happening to us].

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Alberta Tourism Partnership

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow a three-year contract between the Alberta Tourism Partnership and the government of Alberta will be formally signed in historic Fort Macleod by the ATP president – [some applause] Thank you – and CEO, Tom McCabe, and our Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. This signing is a result of the evolution over decades of an idea, the idea of a region selling itself as a tourism destination point, which began back in the 1940s and early '50s.

It all started in Fort Macleod with prominent, progressive southern Albertans like Hugh Craig, Sven Erickson, Ted Kreitzer, and Albert Swinarton. They promoted to the United States the whole of southern Alberta as a tourism destination point. Tourism operators in the area formed a partnership and shared information and marketed southern Alberta locations and vistas. This ultimately led to the formation of TIAALTA, the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta, with its 14 different tourist zones.

These zones have now evolved to ATP and the tourism destination regions. ATP will deliver its services through six tourism destination regions. They will be the focal points for distributing quality services tailored to the needs of the industry. ATP expects to increase tourism revenues to more than \$4 billion by the end of 1998.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, tourism is vital to our economy. In terms of economic input tourism leads all other industries in our province with the exception of agriculture and the oil and gas sector. The tourism industry directly employs over 100,000 Albertans. In terms of financing the industry is committed to leveraging government dollars with funding from the private sector at a ratio of 2 to 1. This will result in an economic impact of more than \$26 million. Government has also taken steps to ensure account-

ability for taxpayers' dollars. The ATP has developed a three-year business plan and will provide quarterly updates.

We have opened a new era for tourism, Mr. Speaker, and with the signing of this contract Albertans will get the best value for their tourism dollar.

head: **Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(5) I'd like to ask the Government House Leader what the projected order of business is for next week.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, on Monday in the afternoon we'll be considering the budget debate; leading remarks coming from the Leader of the Opposition are what are anticipated. In the evening we'll be in Committee of Supply on supplementary supply estimates, day 1.

On Tuesday in the afternoon we'll continue to consider at second reading Bill 6 and, depending if that moves along, then move to Committee of the Whole for consideration of Bills 1 to 5 inclusive. In the evening we'll be back in Committee of Supply for day 2 of the supplementary supply estimates.

Then on Wednesday, February 28, in the evening we'll be in Committee of Supply for consideration of the Department of Transportation and Utilities. Following that, there will also be second reading of Bill 10, the appropriation Bill.

Then on Thursday we'll be in Committee of Supply, Family and Social Services and the Department of Energy; and under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of the Whole on the appropriation Bill 10.

THE SPEAKER: Before proceeding to points of order, might there be unanimous consent in the Assembly to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed?

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 29 eager grade 6 students from Clive school, a school that I have visited often. With them is their teacher, very popular Rob MacKinnon; parent helpers Mrs. Shelley Nicholson, Mrs. Merlene Giles, Mrs. Myrna Jones, Mrs. Wanda Grose, Mr. Walter Hunter, Mrs. Sue Tees, Mrs. Crystal Fauria, Mrs. Darlene Eby, Mrs. Barb Pierson, Mrs. Linda Ainsworth, Miss Yukato Hishikura, and Mr. and Mrs. Wilf Andrus; as well, capable bus driver Lloyd Stephenson. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray has given the Chair notice that he wishes to raise a point of order.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your kind consent I would like to raise a point of order arising out

of yesterday afternoon's business. I feel it appropriate that I advise you as to the reason why this point of order is being raised only now.

During the debate on the lotteries estimates I had received an opinion and ruling from the Ethics Commissioner that I ought not to participate in that debate or be in the Legislative Assembly during that debate. I honoured that commitment and was out of the room but was informed by various colleagues that the hon. minister – to whom, I must say, I have also given notice that I intend to raise this point of order – had incorporated into the debates some comments of letters taken out of context that I had written to the minister. As a result, I want to raise as a point of order now 23(i), imputing false motives to a member, and I would like your permission to proceed with that point of order. The Hansard Blues, incidentally, for some technical or mechanical reason to the best of my knowledge were not available until late yesterday evening; therefore I was not in a position to bring this point of order earlier.

There is precedent for this, Mr. Speaker, because the hon. Member for Barrhead-Westlock raised a point of order last year on myself that was raised the day subsequent following something that had occurred in the afternoon.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, certainly we don't want to limit somebody raising a point of order. We will look for your caution and direction because *Beauchesne* 321 is clear that

a point of order against procedure must be raised promptly and before the question has passed to a stage at which the objection would be out of place.

I'm not suggesting this point of order be denied, but there is a cautionary note because of the timing.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair feels it should hear from the hon. member because of the fact that he was precluded from being present for the debate.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much. This point of order is a most serious one because I will be, in the ruling from the Chair, asking the Speaker to comment on the use that may be put to members' letters when they write to various ministers, lobbying or advocating a position on behalf of constituents. I've always thought, Mr. Speaker, that I was elected to put forward the reasonable requests of constituents who feel that they are having difficulty with some or all of the government departments.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, a letter that I had written to the minister advocating on behalf of commercial constituents in the Fort McMurray area who felt that they were being prejudiced by the government's freeze on VLT machines when their competitors adjacent to them were suffering no cut setback had resulted in a request from these constituents that I specifically write to the minister putting forward their proposition that as long as VLTs were lawfully allowed in the province of Alberta, they were entitled to their prorated share. I put that to the minister on two occasions. We had two pieces of dialogue by way of letter, and I made clear in those letters that I was not expressing policy on behalf of the Alberta opposition. I was not expressing anything other than the constituent's view. In the letter I indicated to the minister some methodology by which he could bring about equity, irrespective of what the government's ultimate policy on VLT machines was.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you can imagine my surprise yesterday when I saw read into *Hansard* a record that was prefaced with the comment that I was perhaps part of a group that was a hypocrite

and a suggestion that I was comfortable with certain government policies, whereas in fact all I was doing was lobbying for and on behalf of my constituents.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East had a letter read into the record as well, written on behalf of his constituents. I think the Chair must, with respect, certainly give me as a member some direction as to what appropriate use may be put to letters that we write to government officials, lobbying on behalf of our constituents. If I write to the Minister of Justice on behalf of a grieving mother who says that her child is being mistreated in our penal institutions, it does not mean that I'm soft on crime. If I write on behalf of an individual who feels that they are not getting enough social service, it does not mean that I am taking a position one way or another with the policies of the government. I am simply advocating on behalf of my constituents.

I would like the hon. minister opposite to fairly concede that I indicated in that correspondence that I was not expressing policy points or getting into a policy debate. I would like him to concede that I was simply advocating on behalf of my constituent in those comments.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I understand perhaps the feeling of the individual member, but I don't see any point of order here. I honestly don't. Under what circumstances is he trying to portray that he didn't take a position on behalf of his constituent? I brought it into the debate yesterday. He's only stating the facts that I brought forward yesterday.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Well, the Chair is somewhat at a disadvantage without seeing the full text of the letter written by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray to the hon. minister. The Chair feels that that has some implication on what is being raised here. The Chair would like to have the opportunity of seeing that document and also reviewing it in the context of the way in which it was referred to in the debate before making any final judgment on the matter.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

DR. WEST: Yes. If one of the pages will come here, I'll submit both letters that I made reference to yesterday so that the Speaker can have that.

THE SPEAKER: Were there other points?

MR. DAY: Are you asking for other points of order or further to this point, Mr. Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: If the Government House Leader has something further to this point, we're prepared to hear the Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: I was anticipating following your remarks. Certainly we leave the ruling up to your wise judgment. I think it's instructive that no citation was given, unless I missed it. Was there a citation? [interjection] Thank you. I stand corrected on that. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that there was a citation. I did not hear it. I would suggest, however, that what we have here is a point of clarification, as you have ruled in the past. The member obviously feels awkward about something, but taking the time of the House and the Assembly to clarify a position under a point of order I would suggest is not a point of order.

DR. NICOL: I would also just like to inform you that I would like to submit to your office, before you make your ruling, the letter that I wrote in response to my constituents which outlines specifically that I was approaching the minister on their behalf, not on behalf of my feelings or my party's feelings. So I'll submit that to your office as well. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order, please. The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities has given the Chair a copy of a letter dated February 20, 1996. So that is in the possession of the Chair. Is the Chair to assume that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East joins in the same point of order as was raised by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray?

DR. NICOL: That's true, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Well, then, the Chair will, as indicated earlier, read the *Hansard* for yesterday and these letters together before making a decision.

MR. GERMAIN: Sir, on a point of clarification then. Did the minister table both of my letters or just one? I wasn't sure.

THE SPEAKER: Well, the Chair is in possession of a letter dated September 8, 1995.

MR. GERMAIN: All right. Then I'll ask the Chair leave to table the other letter as well, the paired communication that goes with this.

THE SPEAKER: As long as the hon. member will provide it to the Chair, that's all that's required, I believe, for this purpose. If you'll do that in a timely way.

Any further points of order?

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

Black History Month

THE SPEAKER: Then there's an application to be made under Standing Order 40 by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the urgency associated with Standing Order 40s and specifically the motion that I am seeking unanimous consent for in order for this Assembly to proceed with reviewing the motion. That is that we should as an Assembly recognize that February is Black History Month in Alberta. The need for the urgency is simply because of course these celebrations are well under way already and the largest group of activities take place this weekend. This is really our, shall we say, timely opportunity to address and recognize this significant milestone in the black community of Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Is there unanimous consent in the Assembly for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore to move his proposed motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize that February is Black History Month in Alberta.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course February is not only the month set aside to officially celebrate Black History Month. As most individuals here know, February is also Heart Month, which is sponsored by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, and it's also Potato Month, sponsored by the Potato Growers of Alberta, and it's Rural Crime Watch time throughout the province. But today we have an opportunity to specifically salute that aspect of our culture which frequently goes unnoticed.

This particular occasion is now an annual tradition which focuses our attention on Alberta's very rich cultural heritage and the tremendous contributions made to our heritage by the many people who came before us and in this case the contributions of ancestors of black heritage. Albertans and particularly those of black ancestry, Mr. Speaker, have been participating in a larger celebration called Black History Month throughout North America since about 1970. In Alberta I think we've been celebrating Black History Month since 1980. So it's relatively new, yet it does have good, solid roots.

Many blacks first came to Canada as early as 1800, in many cases fleeing oppression, discrimination, and other injustices thrust upon them in other countries. Alberta's first large group of black settlers came to our province in 1908 and settled in the Wildwood area, or what was then called Junkins. Subsequently, of course, more blacks arrived and settled in other areas near Breton to our southwest, in the Campsie area around Barrhead, Amber Valley, and of course elsewhere.

Amber Valley, Mr. Speaker, is always recognized as virtually an all-black community in Alberta, a very unique part of our heritage. It's also saluted as being that small community that gave rise to the very, very famous championship black baseball team which toured extensively during that time and is recorded in many history books as being a very positive vehicle for positive imagery throughout Alberta for the new settlers at that time.

There are many projects that take place throughout Alberta during this month to mark this very great occasion, Mr. Speaker. Among them, of course, are numerous film festivals, music extravaganzas, television broadcasts, prayer meetings, lectures, and symposia, as well as many displays and community-based activities.

Mr. Speaker, during my career as a director and developer of educational materials and, specifically, cultural materials, I had the great fortune to become rather extensively involved in many projects that researched the history and contributions of blacks in Alberta. Some of the more recognizable names that were associated thereto include individuals such as John Ware, who is widely respected as Alberta's first black cowboy. It does a lot to encourage others to follow in his footsteps. Of course everyone in this Assembly remembers Clarence "Big" Miller, who's acknowledged as one of our greatest pioneers of jazz music in the province. He did a great deal to encourage and enthuse others to follow in his footsteps. There's also Velma Carter and her son Lee Carter, who worked on updating and even correcting some of the phrases that were contained in educational materials such that blacks would be more accurately portrayed in those and other subsequent publications.

There are numerous others of course, Mr. Speaker, who have worked tirelessly on behalf of the greater good of their own

community and the greater good of all Albertans. Another name that springs to mind is Gervis "Collie" Collins, who some will remember cofounded the Caribbean dance group that later became known as the caribeans dancing group, but she is perhaps more recognized as the cofounder of the black heritage school which came to be several years ago, and it helped inspire young students to become lifelong learners and allowed them an opportunity to better understand themselves and their heritage within the Canadian context and, specifically, within the Alberta context, where this school was founded. We all know of course our friend Fil Fraser, who's been and continues to be a beaming beacon in the broadcasting media, film, and television industry, as well as in the area of multiculturalism and human rights.

There are numerous black leaders, outstanding Albertans, Mr. Speaker, who work on many, many projects such as those enumerated. Among them also are people at the local community level, who don't often get the praise and accolades that the press affords to others, people like Michael Broodhagen, Ben Ayorech, Alwyn Brightley, Lance Booth, Dolly Booth, Selwyn Jacobs, Francine Govia, and numerous others. These people are all members of different organizations. Some of them include the National Black Coalition of Alberta, the Council of Black Organizations in our province, along with the Jamaican Association, the Barbados Cultural Association, and the Congress of Black Women, to name just a few.

3:00

I've worked with pretty well all of those organizations in one capacity or another during my 25 years of involvement in the heritage of Alberta, and it gives me great pride to salute them on this very special day. They undertake numerous projects to promote a deeper understanding and an acceptance of our rich cultural diversity in Alberta. We thank them and all the volunteers who work in dozens of similar organizations for their efforts, which remind us of our proud and colourful past as we move toward an even greater future of respect and acceptance of one another, regardless of our cultural, religious, or ancestral backgrounds.

It's important to recognize events like Black History Month, Mr. Speaker, because these events do so much to help promote the positive aspects, the positive feelings that we sometimes take for granted in sharing with each other. They also encourage more friendly interaction at the community level as well as a greater cross-cultural sharing and understanding. Years ago when I was working as a cultural educationalist, I coined the following phrase, which has stuck with me and guided a large part of my philosophy about life: the more we know about each other, the less we fear our differences. Let us all embrace the spirit and meaning of that phrase by furthering our own knowledge, our own understanding, and our heartfelt acceptance of one another for the betterment of our community and for the brightest possible future for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations to all those people involved with Black History Month in Alberta, and congratulations to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for allowing unanimous consent for this motion to proceed within the greater context of being truly dedicated Canadians to our multicultural cause.

Thank you.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, may I at the outset join with the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore in supporting the resolution to recognize February as Black History Month in Alberta. I know my colleagues on the government side of the House are very appreciative of the fact that we've got the opportunity this

afternoon to say a few words about the black community in the province of Alberta.

The hon. member has very correctly talked about John Ware, the original black rancher/cowboy in the province of Alberta. I guess if folks in the Calgary area want to take an hour or two off this weekend, they might go down to Fish Creek park and see the original ranch house that is now located there. Of course, the hon. member has talked about other distinguished members of the black community: Mr. Miller, the Carters, Gervis Collins, and others.

Mr. Speaker, he also made mention of three communities in the province of Alberta that are very near and dear to me and to other colleagues in the House. Amber Valley, of course, is located in the constituency represented by the minister of social services. The former Minister of Transportation and Utilities, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, has Wildwood in his constituency. Campsie is located in the constituency that I have the privilege of representing. Over the years I've had an opportunity to visit all three communities and be a part of and mix with the original pioneers of the black community that did settle in those areas. Amber Valley is perhaps the best known because it was certainly the largest of these three communities that we had in our part of Alberta.

In a previous career that I had a long time ago, Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to be an educator, a teacher. I did teach children of the black community, of one of the original families that settled in the Campsie area, and they are the Beaver family. It was remarkable to hear the stories passed on to them by their father and mother and their grandparents and their great-grandparents: how they made the trek out of various parts of the United States to come to find freedom and peace and respect and dignity for themselves and for people who had the same colour that they did when they fled that unsavoury part of the history of our great neighbour to the south, Mr. Speaker.

They have made a remarkable contribution to the mosaic of Alberta. Alberta is a multicultural province. Alberta is a place that is for all of us, irrespective of your language or your culture or the colour of your skin or your religion. It is a place where cultures and people from all parts of the world have been able not only to flourish, Mr. Speaker, but have been able to live together with respect for one another and great love for the richness that they can find in other people.

We're very appreciative and I'm sure that all members of the black community in Alberta are appreciative of the initiative taken by the black community in America to basically foster the importance of their history in the United States. This custom has now moved into the province of Alberta. As we celebrate Black History Month in the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope that all of us will take a little bit of time to learn a bit more about their rich, interesting, and informative history. The people of the black community have made remarkable contributions to the history of their province – their province – and our province.

So we want to say thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore for raising this motion this afternoon.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thought after hearing the exhaustive review of the history of the black community in Alberta offered by my friend for Edmonton-Avonmore that there's little I might add. But I would suggest

this: it's worthwhile noting that in this last year the black achievement awards for the first time in the history of Alberta were held in the city of Calgary. There was a very large crowd, some excellent entertainment. Fil Fraser, former Chief Commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission, was singled out for the first award: to a member of the community that had provided exemplary service to the people of Alberta and this province. I think it's worth noting that.

I'd point out, in case anybody suggests that John Ware should be seen as a son of Calgary, that actually he ultimately settled on a ranch near Dorothy, Alberta, I believe, and in fact owned that until his death.

I would just say that those people that had left Oklahoma to escape racial persecution and who settled in Amber Valley – even though unfortunately many of them did not stay – serve to remind all of us that Alberta is very much a place that people throughout the U.S. and many other parts of the world have come to settle, escaping persecution for a variety of reasons. It's a spirit that we might recall later when we're dealing with amendments to the Individual's Rights Protection Act, because that's part of our history. Recognizing the black achievement awards and Black History Month in this province is just a useful reminder I think to every member of this Assembly.

So I thank my colleague from Edmonton-Avonmore for raising this, for introducing the motion. I'm delighted that it's receiving the kind of support it is in the House. Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add my comments to this very special month for the people that have come to Alberta from many corners. Wildwood, or Junkins as it was called then, had a number of these people living in the area, and they became great friends of mine. I recall so well the Amber Valley group. I played baseball against them and the Wildwood group some years ago. They were just a tremendous group of people that came to Canada to be Canadians. They were my friends, regardless of colour or nationality. They were the kind of people that wanted to be Canadians and were happy to be away from the places they left.

Now, I want to say that I have some personal friends in that group of people from Wildwood, and one is Jimmy Akers, who until recently ran a TV shop but has passed on. I want to pay tribute to his family, because there are still some of them there. Like I said, they were great people, great athletes. They wanted to be left alone to be Canadians, and I think we can take our hats off to those kind of people that leave aside the prejudice of the world and want to be just themselves along with us.

So I salute the people that came here, and I want to salute again Black History Month, that we have today. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried, let the record show unanimously.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has an application to make to the Assembly.

Alberta Winter Games

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addressing the matter of urgency, the athletes that will be attending the games arrive in Lethbridge today, as the games will be from today until Sunday the 25th. I think, then, that this is an appropriate time to recognize everyone's hard work and really to wish them well in their endeavours this weekend, because right now they all are winners. They've represented their zones. They've won those competitions. Now they're heading down to our part of the country to try to move forward.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Is there agreement in the Assembly to allow the hon. member to move his motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Dunford moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize the efforts of athletes, organizers, and volunteers involved in the 1996 Alberta Winter Games being held in Lethbridge, Crownsnest Pass, and West Castle from February 22 to February 25, 1996.

MR. DUNFORD: I'll try not to be too long, Mr. Speaker. One of the things I want to mention at the outset is of course that the opening and closing ceremonies will be in the city of Lethbridge for the Alberta Winter Games. I realize that Lethbridge has had a great amount of exposure on this, but I certainly want at this point in time to recognize all of the people from southern Alberta, especially those in southwestern Alberta, the community of Crownsnest Pass, and of course the West Castle ski hill. As many of you might know, having visited Lethbridge, we're not in a very good position to offer some of the ski competitions. If you've been down there recently, you'll notice that we look like we're almost in mid-April or early May in the sense that we are bare and practically dry.

I want to point out that coming to Lethbridge this weekend there will be some 2,500 athletes aged 12 to 18. They're of course representing eight zones, and this really ranges from the sunny south right up to the Peace Country. So it's an opportunity for young Albertans to not only get together and compete in a healthy manner but also for them to have that opportunity to be able to exchange some of the various diversities that we have within this particular province. More importantly, hopefully, they will then be able to make some new Alberta friends that may last them a lifetime.

The mission statement, for those of us interested in this type of an objective, for the games in Lethbridge is:

to provide young athletes with a positive, well-organized sports competition while providing rewarding social and cultural experiences for participants and the community, leaving the City and region a legacy of enriched volunteer resources and a record of fiscal responsibility.

We are calling the games a Festival of Friends, so we've gone far beyond just simple sports competition. For the last couple of months – and my colleague from Lethbridge-East certainly can correct me on this if I've even shortened that – we have been running cultural festivals within our city. We have had art shows throughout the region. Of course we have a tremendous asset in the fact that at the University of Lethbridge we have one of the finest collections of art within not Alberta and not western Canada

but Canada, and perhaps we might extend that to North America. So through these games there's been an enrichment of lives in southern Alberta that has gone far, far beyond the competition and spirit that athleticism brings but actually of culture as well.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that as soon as one starts to bring names into it, one is going to end up in trouble, because I'm going to probably miss somebody. But I think that because of the tremendous work that has been done over a long period of time in our particular area, I'd just quickly like to make reference to a number of people. I want to say congratulations and best wishes to the chairman, Gary Bowie; the vice-chairman, Mel Clewes; also the director of festivals, Birthe Perry; the director of protocol, Jane Anderson; regional director, Nestor Chorney; director of sports, Carole Gemer; director of administration, Bill Persley; director of resources and recruitment, George Virtue; director of facilities, food, accommodation, and transportation, Bev Paterson; the secretary of the board, Rita Zaugg; of course the general manager, Elenore Kubik; and the city of Lethbridge liaison, Carol Thibert.

Now, both my colleague from Lethbridge-East and I have been able to visit the administration offices for the Winter Games on many, many occasions. Just a tremendous amount of work, a tremendous amount of spirit in trying to get a job done and done well certainly exists. While I just named these people, there actually are 4,500 other volunteers, not only from the city of Lethbridge but throughout the south and, you might even say, in some cases representing their particular sports, really throughout Alberta. They are in our community this weekend to celebrate what I'm sure will be just tremendous games. I'm sure we will be able to uphold the long and quite successful tradition of the Alberta Winter Games in this province.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to stand and support this motion raised by my colleague from Lethbridge-West. I just want to thank him for bringing this forth especially today, before the games start for the weekend.

By bringing the motion forward today, it gives us an opportunity really to recognize and thank everyone that's involved, all of the volunteers. As my colleague has mentioned, this is a south-west Alberta effort. It encompasses the city of Lethbridge, all of the little communities around Lethbridge. Volunteers have come from many of those little communities to help because of the commitment that they have to our region, to the spirit of the Winter Games, and to the idea that athletics are a real way to promote sportsmanship and fair play among all Albertans. This is important to our community and to the community of Alberta.

I'd also like to recognize the volunteers that have participated in all the zone playoffs, that have led up to the selection of the 2,300 or so young athletes that are going to be coming to Lethbridge. They've contributed greatly to an effort that really helps to build spirit and helps to build community across Alberta, not just in the particular area that is holding the games at the end of the process. Each of the zone playoffs have had their own support volunteers, their support systems.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to recognize and thank the numerous groups that have sponsored particular aspects of the games, both the finals in Lethbridge and southwestern Alberta this weekend as well as the zones. It's the contributions of businesses in the community, of community groups, as well as the efforts of the funding agencies that are involved, all of their support, that make these games possible.

It's really important that we recognize what this does for our community. It brings forth volunteerism, as my colleague for Lethbridge-West has mentioned. Southern Alberta right now is really kind of on a high. They're coming out of a cold winter. A lot of work was done coming out of what southern Alberta might call cold conditions. But it's really brought the community together. There are always more than enough volunteers every time they call for something to be done, and it's really important that we recognize the motion that's come forth now to basically say thank you to all of those people.

We'd like to just basically look at the idea that with these sponsorships that have come out, the volunteers, this makes Alberta what we like to call home, and it's part of being home that we're all looking forward to this weekend as we go back to Lethbridge, where it's a little bit warmer. The spirit that's going to be there is going to come from all across Alberta, and I congratulate all of them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would just like to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing this motion forward. I echo the words of my hon. colleague but also of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East about it being a truly southwest Alberta extravaganza this weekend.

The people of the Crownsnest Pass and the people of the Pincher Creek area, who are looking after events such as ski jumping, cross-country skiing, luge events, and downhill events in the West Castle Valley, will treat the folks and the volunteers down in the Crownsnest Pass and the Pincher Creek area very, very well.

We'd like to particularly point out the efforts of the transportation committee, because anytime you take an event out of a major city and start transporting people some hundred kilometres away, it does present some very unique situations. But the friends they will make in West Castle Valley, the Crownsnest Pass will be worth the transportation and worth the experience.

We thank the municipalities of those areas for helping to make our tracks and our ski areas available and in good shape despite the weather that we're having. Truly, the Festival of Friends will be a success not only for the people who are putting on the event but for the people that are participating. Our folks in southwest Alberta, in Pincher Creek-Macleod say thank you to Lethbridge and thank you to the province of Alberta for choosing southwest Alberta.

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

3:20

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to join my colleagues from Lethbridge-West, Lethbridge-East, and Pincher Creek-Macleod in recognizing the efforts of the athletes, organizers, and volunteers involved in the 1996 Alberta Winter Games. St. Albert had the privilege of hosting the 1994 Winter Games: a tremendous time. I guess I speak from the experience of having gone through those events in St. Albert. It was indeed a privilege and an honour as we passed the flag from St. Albert to the city of Lethbridge to take over for the next games that are going on. It is truly a time for all Albertans to be proud.

I believe it would be nice if this event was hosted every 10 years by the same community, because it brings forward a spirit of community. Activities bring people together. That is never

seen many times unless these activities take place. It also brings forward mentorship for our young people to realize the meaning and the tremendous benefit of these events.

Also, going through the whole proposal, I notice that three or four years of work are involved in the games. It starts with the proposal and the lobbying for your community. I'd like to thank and recognize the chairmen of the various committees that are involved. I think there are 10 or 12 of them from fund-raising to transportation, as the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod has said. Also, the tremendous volunteer participation: 4,500 volunteers prepare up to two or three years to make sure this event is successful. Many corporate and individual sponsors come forward with money or goods and service to make this a success. The 2,500 athletes: I believe we have more athletes in this event than they do in the Olympics. Taking care of them and making sure things run well is a great accomplishment.

To the athletes: we wish everyone the very best at the games in southwest Alberta. They will bring the whole area together, and they will have a great time, a time that won't be forgotten for many years.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the time is late, and we have another important detail here to take care of today. But on behalf of the constituents of Little Bow I, too, want to express my thanks to our colleague for Lethbridge-West for bringing forth a very special Standing Order 40. My thoughts are with the young kids, the parents, and the coaches who helped them get there today. When I drive home tonight - I ask that my friend and colleague for Lethbridge-West pass on our best wishes to everyone at the games. Have a great time. [interjections] Oh no, I'm sorry; I'm driving.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, let's not forget the kids and the efforts that they've put in to get there. This is their time, a chance to be a Wayne Gretzky or a Barbara Ann Scott. Hair on 'em and good luck.

THE SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried, let the record show unanimously.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, further to discussions with the Opposition House Leader, at this time I would like to move that we have a short recess and return at 4 o'clock for the reading of the budget.

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Government House Leader, does the Assembly agree?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:26 p.m. to 4 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Administrator, which I now transmit to you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Administrator transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the 12 months ending March 31, 1997, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Administrator transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31, 1996, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Administrator transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31, 1997, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

5. Moved by Mr. Dinning:

Be it resolved that the messages of His Honour the Honourable the Administrator, the 1995-96 supplementary supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried]

6. Moved by Mr. Dinning:

Be it resolved that the Assembly do resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Motion carried]

7. Moved by Mr. Dinning:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(6) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 1995-96 supplementary supply estimates shall be two days.

[Motion carried]

8. Moved by Mr. Day:

Be it resolved that the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain Bills on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, before moving the motion, I am tabling Agenda '96, which sets out the government's fiscal and business plan, as required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act. Agenda '96 also includes business plans for each ministry that must be made public under section 13 of this Act.

10. Moved by Mr. Dinning:

Be it resolved that the messages of His Honour the Honourable the Administrator, the estimates and business plans and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried]

head: **Budget Address**

9. Moved by Mr. Dinning:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, three years ago Premier Ralph Klein made a promise to Albertans. He promised we would balance the budget and we would do it with no tax increases and no new taxes. Today we have kept that promise. Today Alberta has a balanced budget, a balanced budget and a surplus for this year and every year from here on in. Those words "a balanced budget," "surpluses every year," don't say enough about the hard work, the energy, the sacrifice, and the determination it took to get Alberta to this day.

Before I go into the details for Agenda '96, I want to say a thank you to all Albertans. Our thanks go to all of those people who work so hard and so diligently in Alberta's public sector. Thank you to you, Mr. Premier, and to all of our colleagues who kept us on track and moving forward to this day. And, most of all, thank you to Albertans. It's a proud day for this province, a proud day for Albertans who said right from the beginning: get on with the job and get it done. We've done it. Working with Albertans together, Mr. Speaker, we have done it, and today I am especially proud to call myself an Albertan.

Three years ago we set out on a collective journey. Our destination was a better Alberta. The first leg, the toughest leg of the journey, was to achieve a balanced budget. We knew we had to make it past that first leg or the rest of the journey simply would not be possible, and as a result we set a fast and deliberate pace to get the toughest part behind us.

The results. The results speak for themselves. A balanced budget this year and every year forever. A \$1.5 billion down payment on our debt, thanks in large measure to windfall revenues from the last two years. We've taken our 25-year mortgage repayment plan and paid off enough money to knock it down to an 18 and a half year mortgage. We eliminated a \$3.4 billion deficit through spending reductions of 21 percent. Spending is now at a level that we can afford in good times and bad. We reduced the size of government by almost a third, and our economy is growing steadily. Today there are 109,000 more jobs than there were when Ralph Klein became the Premier of Alberta, and this year we'll move well beyond the target of 110,000 new jobs. Those are results that Albertans can be proud of, and they have been achieved with no tax increases and no new taxes.

A balanced budget, Mr. Speaker, is an important step in our journey to a better Alberta, and with that goal achieved we're going to keep right on going with our sights firmly set on the rest of the journey.

There are three messages I want Albertans to remember about Agenda '96. First, we have balanced the budget, and it's going to stay that way. It's been hard work, but it's been worth it.

Second, we have found a fiscal formula that works, and we're going to stick with it. We've reduced spending and started to pay down our debt. We've made tough decisions to change the way government does business. We've abandoned the status quo and freed Alberta from the straitjacket of deficits and mounting debt. There is no going back.

Third, we've worked hard to build a rock-solid foundation for the future, and we're going to work just as hard to maintain that foundation. We promise Albertans we won't blow it, because it's that very foundation that gives us the ability to look ahead, the flexibility to make improvements where they are needed, and the

opportunity to make real choices about what Albertans want in the future.

4:10

Those clear choices are what reinvestment is all about. Clear choices: choosing to pay down our debt even faster than our current plan, choosing to spend more on top-priority programs to achieve real improvements for Albertans, choosing to reduce taxes. Those are choices that simply were not possible three years ago. Now they are, and the choices Albertans make in the coming months will set the direction for the next leg of our journey to build a better Alberta.

This year and for every year from now on Albertans can expect to see their government stick to the basics: responsible and careful spending, spending that stays pretty much at the level we're at now; deliberate pay down of Alberta's debt; conservative forecasts of our revenues. We won't bank on windfall profits and then be disappointed at the end of the year. We'll take stock and make improvements where they are needed, we'll measure results and make sound decisions with them, and we'll wisely reinvest in specific initiatives that reflect the priorities of Albertans.

When the Provincial Treasurer stands in the Legislative Assembly to deliver a Budget Address, Albertans will know exactly what to expect: a balanced budget; surpluses every single year, surpluses that give us a down payment on our debt every single year; and annual decisions about priorities and improving results. No more unpleasant surprises, no more big spending plans followed by massive cuts. Just good, responsible, sound fiscal management.

Balancing the budget is not just a onetime event. As much as some might like to, we can't sit back now and say, "Well, that's over and done with." It's going to be a challenge to balance the budget every year, a challenge to withstand the pressure from those who want to go back to the old days of throwing money at problems. It's not going to happen. We will not compromise the hard work it has taken to get us to where we are today. Free spending didn't solve the problems, and it certainly didn't create a better future for our children. In fact, it was quite the opposite. From now on every generation of Albertans is going to pay their own way.

With the passing this week of former Premier Ernest Manning, it is fitting that we would repeat the pay-as-you-go message. It's the very same message, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer, Ernest Manning, delivered in this Assembly 50 years ago.

Let me speak candidly to those who have their eyes set on the surplus. Forget it. The only time we will make decisions about spending is right now, at the beginning of the year when the budget is set. At the end of the year, when we know the size of the surplus, there is no choice. No one can choose to spend the surplus. It must go to pay down Alberta's debt. That's the law in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and that is our commitment to Albertans. This government will fight just as hard to keep the budget balanced as we did to get here. It will take the same determination. It will take the same discipline. It will take the same single-mindedness. And it will take the same commitment to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, as the Premier put it, 1996 is a year of transition. Albertans have already started to see the first benefits of the solid foundation we've built over the past three years. This year we have the flexibility to take stock, to assess the changes from the last few years, and to take clear and deliberate action where it can produce real and measurable improvements for Albertans.

There are a number of financial highlights for Budget '96. It's the first balanced budget in 12 years. Today we replace a decade of deficits with a future of surpluses. This year's surplus is estimated conservatively at \$23 million. Legislation that was passed unanimously by this Legislature requires us to build in revenue cushions of \$545 million in case oil and gas prices decline or in case corporate profits go down. If those cushions are still there at the end of the year – if oil averages at \$18.50 for the year, if gas stays at \$1.45 for the year, if the interest rates and exchange rates stay where we hope they will – if all of those ifs come true, then we might end up with a surplus of over \$500 million. And if that occurs, Mr. Speaker – there are no ifs about it – that money will go to pay down our debt.

This year we will spend \$12.3 billion providing programs for Albertans. That's down \$135 million from last year's forecast spending. Almost 73 percent of our program spending goes to Albertans' top priorities: health, education, and support for people and families in need. That's up from 64 percent of our budget when we started on this balanced budget course.

Mr. Speaker, we've listened to Albertans and addressed their priorities. Today a bigger proportion of our total spending goes directly to what counts the most for Albertans: health, basic and postsecondary education, and social programs. This year we will spend \$8.9 billion on those four areas. That's up – that's up – \$72 million from last year. Spending on other government programs will go down by \$207 million this year.

Budget '96 calls for \$815 million in spending on the essential capital infrastructure that supports the quality of life that we enjoy in Alberta: up-to-date equipment for the health system, quality schools, good highways and roads, secure water systems, and seniors' lodges for those who have helped build our province.

On the revenue side we forecast total revenues of \$14.2 billion, down slightly from last year. The drop in revenue is due to reductions in federal transfers to Alberta. This year we are looking at cuts of \$239 million in federal cash transfers for health, postsecondary education, and social assistance. Before I go any further, let me reinforce the fact that we as a government are not passing on those reductions, Mr. Speaker, not to postsecondary students, not to people who depend on social assistance, and not to seniors and all Albertans who depend on our health system. No other province can protect its citizens that way. That's one more direct benefit of the fiscal actions that we have taken.

We will also start off this year with another substantial pay-down of Alberta's debt. We will post a surplus at the end of '95-96 estimated at over \$570 million.

This year Albertans are seeing the first benefits, the first dividends from paying off debt. Debt-servicing costs are down \$134 million since '94-95, and for the first time in three years we have flexibility: flexibility to stop \$53 million in planned reductions to regional health authorities; flexibility to restore full funding for early childhood services; and flexibility to begin reinvestment, providing students in our schools with better access to computers and linking their schools to the Internet system, upgrading classrooms across the province, and kick starting a multiyear plan to turn the north-south trade corridor from Grande Prairie to Coutts into a four-lane, job-creating, export highway.

Mr. Speaker, with Agenda '96 we've provided Albertans with a comprehensive plan for the next three years: a plan that reflects Albertans' priorities, focuses on health and education, fine-tunes programs and improves results, a plan that continues to streamline and reduce the administrative costs of government, taking those

savings and applying them to Albertans' priorities, and a plan that keeps moving our province forward.

Today I have tabled what many people recognize as the most comprehensive set of financial books in Canada, and this year we've made them even better. Not only will Albertans see what we plan to spend; they'll also know what we plan to do with those dollars. In this single book, Mr. Speaker, Albertans will find details of our fiscal plan and business plans for every ministry of government. You won't be surprised that I am unable to go into all the details of those 388 pages, much as I might want to, but let me point out some of the highlights.

4:20

Spending on health. My colleague beside me the Minister of Health knows this full well. Spending on health goes up \$37 million this year. We'll spend a total of \$3.7 billion providing Albertans with quality, accessible health care. We've committed extra funding to community health services and home care, and we have frozen health care premiums at their 1995 rates. This year we'll assess the impact of changes and take deliberate action to address problem areas.

Spending on basic education stays about the same, but with a cap on administrative spending more of those dollars will go directly to the classroom. Funding that goes to our school boards for student instruction will increase by \$63 million over last year.

Overall funding for postsecondary education and for social services goes up slightly this year. We'll invest \$52 million to increase access to postsecondary education, make better use of technology, update equipment, and encourage research excellence. Our top priority in social services is children, and this year we will move ahead with a community-delivered approach to providing needed services to children and their families. Funding for the early intervention program for children is being doubled this year to \$20 million.

Across other areas of government Albertans can expect to see a continuing push to streamline and reduce costs, especially for administration. Agencies will be combined and reduced. You'll see more sharing of services across departments continuing to look for better, more cost-effective ways to deliver services. Over the next three years we'll keep asking the important question: how can we save money, meet our core responsibilities, reallocate savings from lower priority programs to ones that are more important to Albertans and at the same time produce better results?

Overall, about 3,100 positions will be eliminated this year. That puts the size of government down almost a third from 1992-93. Most of the reductions involve public servants moving to new opportunities in the private sector, such as working for the Alberta Tourism Partnership or for road construction and engineering companies.

Now let me turn to Alberta's economy. Three years ago this government promised to take a different approach, promised to help create an environment where Alberta's economy can keep on growing with new jobs and new opportunities. But we promised not to do that by picking winners and losers. We promised not to do that, Mr. Speaker, not by picking winners and certainly not by picking losers. Instead of direct incentives, we're promoting a package of advantages that make this province second to none: a tremendous place to work, to invest, to grow, and to raise our families.

The results speak for themselves: 109,000 new jobs in three years and one of the fastest growing economies in Canada. This year we'll keep pushing forward for more investment, more

growth, and more jobs. Our forecast calls for a modest growth this year at about 2.5 percent, up just slightly over 1995. In the next two years we expect Alberta's economy to keep on growing at over 3 percent a year, outpacing the rest of Canada.

Alberta's economic growth in '96 will be led by exports of agricultural products, manufactured goods, crude oil, and natural gas. Alberta's industries send a vast array of quality Alberta products to markets in the United States and around the world, and we expect those markets to grow and stay strong in 1996.

Our vital agricultural sector should enjoy another good year with high grain prices. We expect the manufacturing sector to stay buoyant because of high demand for Alberta's petrochemicals and forest products. Once again, we expect Alberta to be a major tourism destination, attracting more visitors and more tourism dollars to our province. This year we will take specific actions to keep Alberta's economy growing.

After years and years of discussion and debate we will begin to phase out the province's property tax on machinery and equipment. The tax will go down 20 percent this year and 20 percent next year, and the last 60 percent has a big condition attached to it. In order for the tax to be eliminated entirely, industry investment will have to grow to a total of 11 and a half billion dollars between now and 1999. That level of investment will make up for the province's loss in machinery and equipment tax revenue, and it will create quality jobs for Albertans.

Government will also move ahead with the north-south trade highway and continue to promote the Alberta advantage across Canada and around the world. We will develop a new economic development strategy for Alberta, one which builds on our strengths and takes us forward to new opportunities for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '96 is a transition, but it does not mean that we are standing still. We are staying focused. We are staying fiscally responsible. We are taking action to spend money wisely, to encourage new approaches and new ideas that produce better results, and to work with Albertans to create confidence and opportunities for the future.

For three years we've been building a solid foundation: a balanced budget, a deliberate plan to pay down Alberta's debt, and a positive financial outlook. That foundation is now in place. Now, Mr. Speaker, we're able to look ahead. This year and for every year from now on Albertans will see the dividends from responsible spending and paying down Alberta's debt. Instead of being locked into high interest payments, we now have some clear choices to make. Those choices are what reinvestment is all about.

Over the next few weeks we will ask Albertans to give us their advice on how to reinvest and where. As we stick to the responsible course we set, we expect to have extra dollars available, and the question for Albertans is: what should we do with those extra dollars? Should we pay down our debt even faster than our plan anticipates? Should we target spending on important priority programs? Should we reduce taxes? Or should we do a combination of all three?

Let me be very clear about what reinvestment is and what it is not. Reinvestment does not mean a return to the big-spending ways of the past, and we're not talking about spending year-end surpluses. Reinvestment decisions come at the beginning of the year, when we make budget decisions now. Surpluses happen at the end of the year, when we do the final accounting of the books, and then there are no decisions except to obey the law. Surpluses, including any windfall revenues, must go to pay down Alberta's debt. By reinvestment we're talking about planned and

deliberate choices about how to use extra dollars that come from a combination of three sources: lower interest costs, continuing efforts to reallocate and reduce costs, and extra dollars that may be left over after all of our commitments are met.

Reinvestment is an opportunity, an opportunity to consider options that simply were out of the question even a year ago. Maybe it's putting more money into a program to meet health and medical needs of children in school or increasing basic support to disabled Albertans and others who are unable to work. Maybe it's a new initiative to make our communities safer or a new investment in research. Maybe it's improved access to information by Albertans through a public library information network. Maybe it's reducing taxes for lower and middle-income working families. Or maybe it's an extra payment on our mortgage.

The choices we make depend upon what we hear from Albertans. The budget I'm tabling today proposes a comprehensive five-year package of tax reforms, reforms designed specifically to reduce the tax burden for all Albertans and to improve Alberta's competitive advantage. We're asking Albertans to consider that plan as part of the choices they make for reinvestment.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, with the introduction of this package I want to say a special thank you to the hon. Member for Bow Valley for his contribution to the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, as well to Mr. Jack Donald, who served as the chairman of our Tax Reform Commission. They and their fellow members worked diligently over the last three years to prepare valuable recommendations to lighten the load of Albertans.

On the personal tax side the first step we're proposing is an employment tax credit for lower and middle-income working families. These families have had a tough go in the 1980s and '90s, struggling to maintain their homes and support their children while their real purchasing power has dropped. These Albertans work hard to maintain their self-reliance and provide secure homes for their children. Government can do its part by leaving more of their hard-earned wages in their pockets, not in the tax man's pocket.

If Albertans agree, the Alberta employment tax credit would go into effect in January of next year and would be a direct benefit to over 130,000 families and 200,000 children. Together they would pay \$70 million less in taxes, money they can use to support themselves and their children. The tax plan also proposes to phase out the flat tax and then the surtax. Both of these temporary taxes – temporary taxes – were introduced in 1987 as a deficit fighting measure. Like so many taxes temporary measures have a way of becoming permanent drains on the taxpayers' pockets. Not in Alberta. We've achieved a balanced budget, and we think it's time for those taxes to go.

For the second year in a row average provincial property tax rates will go down in 1996, and we expect those rates to go down again next year. This year's tax reductions will save homeowners and farmers across Alberta \$18 million, and businesses will save \$15 million.

On the business tax side both small and large businesses will benefit from a package of tax reductions: reducing M and E taxes, reducing provincial property taxes, eliminating both the flat tax and the surtax. We're proposing to reduce fuel taxes that have a negative impact on Alberta's aviation and railway industries. Efficient transportation is the lifeblood of Alberta's export industries, and reduced fuel taxes should help cut the cost of getting their products to market.

If we look at the total tax package, the tax cut on the personal side that we are proposing is about \$350 million by 2001. Business tax reductions are estimated to be about \$200 million by the same time. I have to stress, however, that I am not announcing tax cuts today except for provincial property taxes. The complete tax plan will proceed only if two basic criteria are met: first, we must be able to afford the plan every single year; and second, Albertans say, yes, that's what should be done.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, the first step is to listen to Albertans, and I hope every one of them takes the opportunity to get involved in the consultation process and let us know what the choices should be.

Mr. Speaker, that's the story for 1996: a balanced budget, a return to annual surpluses, a solid plan to pay down Alberta's debt, continued wise spending to match Albertan's priorities and get the best results, and a new opportunity to make real choices about reinvesting in Alberta's future.

In the words of my favourite philosopher, Mr. Yogi Berra, if you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else. Three years ago, Mr. Speaker, we knew exactly where we were going: we were going to build a better Alberta. And the first leg of our journey was a balanced budget, going from big government with an open cheque book to smaller, more focused government with tight controls on spending. We abandoned the comfort of the status quo and leapt ahead with new ideas and untried solutions. The first leg has been the toughest leg for Albertans.

With today's achievement of a balanced budget we can keep moving ahead now, cast our eyes to the next leg of the journey with wisdom from the past and confidence for the future. Albertans have every reason to look to the future with confidence and with hope. We have built a strong foundation, and we're going to keep right on going, building a better Alberta for your children and for mine.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. the Leader of the Opposition, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 4:38 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

