

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 2, 1996

1:30 p.m.

Date: 96/04/02

[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: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday in the Legislative Assembly regarding the maintenance of the Bow-Crow forest headquarters in Calgary be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to maintain the Bow/Crow Forest Headquarters in Calgary.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to give oral notice that tomorrow I will be introducing Bill 31, the Business Financial Assistance Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 1996.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I am giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of questions 179, 180, 181, and 187.

I also give notice that I will move that motions for returns stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion 183 and Motion 188.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 26

Child and Family Services Authorities Act

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 26, the Child and Family Services Authorities Act.

This government is bringing forward this legislation to enable child and family services authorities to be set up and take on responsibility for planning and delivering services to children and families in their area of the province. Communities have asked for more local responsibility, and across the province Albertans are developing plans to deliver services at a local level. This Bill will support the more than 5,400 Albertans who are currently dedicating their time to developing a community-based delivery system that builds upon the strengths of families and communities. This Bill sets out the process for a community-based system in which service providers will work together, families will receive help early, planning will be done at the local level, and services will respect aboriginal and other cultures and value systems.

Under this Bill the province remains accountable for child and

family services. The government will continue to provide funding, set policy and standards, and oversee monitoring and evaluation of services. The Child Welfare Act and Social Care Facilities Licensing Act will continue to govern these services.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 26 read a first time]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I would move that Bill 26, as just introduced, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table six copies of the government's response to written questions for returns 160, 161, and 162.

I am also pleased to table six copies of the 1993-94 annual report for Red Deer College and six copies of the 1994-95 annual report for Lethbridge Community College.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to table a letter recognizing the outstanding contribution of 20 young athletes in this province as well as their coaches, their trainers, and their manager for winning the Alberta junior C hockey championship this past weekend. These young people, representing the community of Sexsmith, have certainly done not only themselves but the entire province and the entire sport of hockey very proud. I would like to recognize their achievements as indeed it's an opportunity for all of us to thank them for their outstanding efforts. Their dedication and their determination was certainly well demonstrated during the competition and during the entire season.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table today the following annual reports: the Inspection of Animals under the Universities Act for the years ended March 31, 1994, and March 31, 1995, and the Public Health Advisory and Appeal Board for the year ended March 31, 1995. Copies of those will be distributed to members.

As well, Mr. Speaker, on March 25, 1996, during question period I indicated that I would file with the Assembly a list of private operators of long-term care facilities in this province, of which there are some 50-odd, and I'm pleased to file that list at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity today to table a letter to Mr. Ray Cej, the chairman of the Canadian Association of the World Petroleum Congresses, congratulating the organizing committee for securing its successful bid to host the prestigious 16th World Petroleum Congress in Calgary in the year 2000. Along with this letter I

would like to table the association's news release issued today that announces that Canada's bid to host the congress was successful in competition with Australia and Austria.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that this is the first time the congress is being held in Canada since its inception in 1933 in London, England. From June 11 to June 15 in the year 2000 between 3,000 and 5,000 top executives and decision-makers involved in the oil and gas industry from around the world are expected to attend the conference in Calgary. The congress will be held in conjunction with the National Petroleum Show, and this will provide an opportunity to showcase Canadian resources, products, services, technologies, and expertise to worldwide visitors that they may not otherwise be able to access.

So, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government of Alberta I extend congratulations to the Canadian Association of the World Petroleum Congress for a job well done.

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

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four letters addressed to the governor of the Bank of Canada, copied to the minister of state for financial institutions, communicating on behalf of Albertans their concern about the increased fees in the face of record profits of the banking institutions in Canada and Alberta and also the concern of various members of the small business community who have expressed their dissatisfaction with the lending practices of the banks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to file four copies of a letter from the assistant regional director of child welfare of the Edmonton region to child welfare managers in which he states, contrary to what his minister is stating, that there have been huge increases in the apprehensions of children in distress.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table this afternoon a package of 16 draft amendments to Bill 24. These amendments, if accepted, would ensure that Bill 24 reflects every one of the major recommendations from the Equal in Dignity report, not just a few of them.

head: Introduction of Guests
1:40

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the great pleasure of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 49 examples of Alberta's most precious resource, that being our young people. Accompanying them are six additional precious resources, those being parents and teachers. These individuals come to us from Minchau school in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Avonmore. They are here where good things happen. They come from a place where great things happen because great people are involved. I would ask all of them along with my special friend Scott to please stand now and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly. Welcome.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly the members of the Alberta Teachers' Association provincial executive council.

The executive officers are Bauni Mackay, president; Ron Dahl, vice-president; Fran Galbraith, vice-president; Fran Savage, past president; Julius Buski, executive secretary. The district representatives from across this province are Larry Booi, Edmonton city; Denis Espetveidt, Calgary city; Ted Gerlinsky, northeast; Carol Henderson, Calgary district; Al Hrychuk, Edmonton city; Janet Laddish, Edmonton district; Kurt Moench, Calgary city; Ken Offord, central east; Ted Osborne, central north; Terry Riley, southeast; Pat Sokolosky, Calgary city; Norah Thomas, Edmonton city; and John Waterhouse, northwest. As well they are accompanied by staff David Flower, co-ordinator of communications, and Shelley Russell, administrative assistance, government. I would welcome them to the Assembly, and I would ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see that the parents and the teachers from Minchau are here now, and I'd like briefly to introduce them. They are Marlene Hanson, Terry O'Neill, Caroline Balisky, Mr. Husein, Roseanne Thede, and Bev Brown. If those parents and teachers would please stand and receive our welcome as well.

Thank you.

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

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly two very fine, outstanding community leaders from Vegreville: the chair of the Vegreville Catholic school board, Mr. Ed Muzechka, and of course accompanied by the superintendent, Mr. Bernie McCracken. Will they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**
Child Welfare

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, despite resounding evidence – departmental memos, studies, and what seems like endless analysis – that states that there is a serious crisis in the child welfare system, this government, the Premier remains in denial. My questions are to the Premier. Who are we to believe? The Minister of Family and Social Services, who says that apprehensions of children in distress are down 50 percent, or an Edmonton regional director who says clearly that there have been huge increases in apprehensions of children?

MR. KLEIN: Well, until I have concrete and substantiated evidence to the contrary, Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question is the minister.

MR. MITCHELL: The evidence is in the letter that I tabled earlier today in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

Who are we to believe, Mr. Speaker? The Minister of Family and Social Services, who claims that the average caseload per worker is 15, or the caseworkers who claim very clearly that in Edmonton and Calgary caseloads average as much as 30?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to point out is that quite simply the Minister of Family and Social Services, who is attending a welfare conference in Victoria with his colleagues

from across the country, is not here to answer in detail. I can tell you that the welfare caseload in Edmonton, for instance, has gone up in the last couple of years. There's no denying that. But I'd like to point out that the caseload now is lower than it was in 1990 and 1991. So there's something that just doesn't jibe here.

I think that what we're seeing here is a bit of a protest, some resistance and some opposition to the movement from government to community-based service organizations. We will continue to hear the outcries, and we will continue to hear the assertions from the Liberals that there is crisis in child welfare, but I think this has something to do with politics as well, and it has something to do with job protection.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, who exactly would this Premier believe when he's told that there's a crisis in child welfare if isn't the very same workers, his own workers in his own department, who have so clearly stated at personal risk that there is a crisis in child welfare? What would it take for him to believe that?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting, and I refer now to a November 30, 1994, news release out of the Liberal caucus.

MRS. SOETAERT: Nineteen ninety-four? Hello?

MR. KLEIN: A 1994 news release out of the Liberal caucus. [interjections] Listen. Listen. Just keep it shut and listen for a moment; okay? I quote from the news release.

According to the Liberals the report's highlights are the move to integrated community services, allowing aboriginal communities to direct and control services for native children, and a firm focus on early intervention and prevention - all of which are services that the Liberals have supported.

Why did they support it in 1994? Why are they opposing it today?

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, we're not supporting a crisis in child welfare.

Home Care

MR. MITCHELL: My next question. Mr. Speaker, people in this province should be able to rely on their health care system, knowing that it will take care of them when they need it. After undergoing extensive surgery, a Mr. Stephen Melenka was released from hospital into the service of home care and his wife, Mary, who happens to be a retired nurse. Get this, Mr. Speaker. When it came to hooking up his IV bag, the home care nurse explained that due to a shortage they would have to make do and could Mary please find a broomstick to hook up her husband's IV bag. This is health care in Alberta. To the Premier: is this acceptable health care practice, having to scrounge up makeshift medical equipment within the home to provide a necessary medical service?

MR. KLEIN: If that question is to me, Mr. Speaker, no. I agree with the leader of the Liberal opposition that that indeed is pathetic and it ought not to happen. I'm sure that the hon. Minister of Health will detail what actions are available to the family involved.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, again I have to say to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, as I did to another member of his

caucus who brought an item to the floor of the Legislature rather than directly to the minister's office so that it could be responded to promptly, that when these very unfortunate things do happen, the honourable thing to do is to please come to the minister's office. Many members of your caucus, hon. leader, do that, and we are able to resolve those issues very quickly.

These are isolated incidents and should not happen. I agree: should not happen. There will be occasions where something does happen, and we should be dealing with those issues on an isolated basis when they do occur and make sure they don't occur again. That can be better facilitated by coming immediately to my office or to the regional health authority.

Health concerns are not political issues. Mr. Speaker, I spent yesterday with a number of health ministers from across Canada, as well as the Minister of Health Canada, who all clearly stated that health is not a political, partisan, or personal matter. It is a matter of interest to all Canadians, and we should be working collectively to improve those situations. The hon. Leader of the Opposition could do well by bringing those issues directly to the minister or to the regional health authority to ensure that they are corrected immediately.

1:50

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, why is it that the so-called new funding that has been promised year after year after year by this minister and this Premier, by this government, never seems to get down to the community to provide the home care and to buy the medical equipment that's needed to provide quality health care to people in this province?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the money is reaching the community. The program that the hon. member was referring to in his first question was not available a very few short months ago or short years ago. Home intravenous therapy was not known. Today we have home intravenous therapy. It was begun as pilot projects by the two major centres. The \$110 million, the last \$40 million of which kicks in as of the April 1 budget year, has gone to facilitate those types of therapies.

I could point out to him also that renal dialysis is available across this province, where previously people had to travel to Calgary or Edmonton. I could point out to him also a response on home nutritional therapy, the product of which is not a drug, is not covered on a benefit list, but we put in additional dollars to ensure that people who needed that therapy would not suffer a financial hardship by having to pay for that at home. Those dollars have been put in.

I think that what we should be doing is looking at what the regional health authorities have been able to achieve: the ability to keep people with dignity and independence close to their families and loved ones and to give them that support.

Mr. Speaker, the system is working. There is no question that it's undergone a major transition in moving from institution to community, but it is working, and the statistics show that the client satisfaction in these areas is very, very high.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, why won't this government accept one of the founding elements of the Liberal policy on home care which states so clearly that home care money and programs should be in place in the community before people who need them are discharged early from the hospital?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, in fact that has occurred. Home care moneys have increased over 60 percent over the last

four years. I remind the hon. member that an additional \$110 million flowed into community services over the period of the three years of restructuring. The first year was \$30 million, understanding that this was a transition year, the second year was \$40 million, and the third year was another \$40 million.

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member chose to go out and really learn what was happening in the health system, particularly in his own area, he would know that the response in the community has increased many, manyfold and that the system is working, and if he would just, when one or two isolated incidents come up, talk to the regional health authority, make them aware so they can correct that.

Mr. Speaker, the regional health authorities, the Minister of Health, and this government caucus are interested in improving the quality of care to persons. We would like to enlist their productive, proactive help rather than them raising these things on the floor of the Legislature at an opportune time rather than, very appropriately, directly to the minister.

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

Solv-Ex Corporation

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. SEC documents filed by Solv-Ex Corporation identified that Mr. Thompson MacDonald was hired as a consultant to lobby this provincial government. Records from public accounts indicate that about the same time the same Mr. MacDonald was hired by the government to act as a consultant to various departments, primarily the Department of Energy. So in effect Mr. MacDonald was playing both sides. He was getting it coming and going. In conjunction with this I'd like to table form 10-K, recent filings by Solv-Ex Corporation, wherein on page 10 it indicates that Mr. MacDonald was specifically hired to lobby the province and, in addition to that, public accounts documents for 1989 to '93 indicating amounts paid to Mr. MacDonald. My first question is to the Premier. What did Mr. MacDonald do to earn the consulting fees he received from the departments of Energy and science and technology, and what qualifications did he bring for this work?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no idea. It's news to me that he was retained by those agencies. I simply have no details. If the hon. member would provide me with those details, I'll certainly look into it.

No, Mr. MacDonald didn't do much of anything. As a matter of fact, he didn't even work on my leadership campaign. He worked for the other guy. [interjection] Oh, he did the last week. He worked the last week; right.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I would undertake to take the direct question on notice and get back to the hon. member on the particular details.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, I'll ask my next question to the Premier then. Would you accept the fact that your government allows hiring an individual to consult to a government department who at the same time has been employed by a private corporation to lobby that very same department?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no knowledge of Mr. MacDonald being retained by either the Department of Energy or the Science and Research Authority. Perhaps the two ministers can elaborate if they have something to add. I really

don't know. I'll ask the Minister of Energy first and then the hon. minister of science and research.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister of science and research.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly not aware of any consultation or hiring of Thompson MacDonald by our department while I have been in this portfolio. Certainly if he was hired previously, I'd be happy to take that on notice.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, in 1989 to '93 the relationship that Solv-Ex had with the government of Alberta was through the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, better known as AOSTRA. As I said in the supplement to the Premier's answer of the first question, I will undertake to go back to the records and answer the hon. member's question and come back to the House with those answers.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if I could supplement, I've just been handed a note that Thompson MacDonald, who worked on Mr. Orman's campaign, was under contract to Mr. Orman in the early '90s.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Whether it was 1992-93 or '91-92, he was getting paid by the Department of Energy.

Will the Minister of Energy undertake to advise this House specifically what Mr. MacDonald was being paid for?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I believe I've answered that question twice already, in the main question and the first supplemental.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Ambulance Services

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans who may suddenly become critically ill or seriously injured want to be assured that transportation will be appropriately dispatched in an efficient manner if their illness or injury is a time-dependent, life-threatening emergency. My questions today regarding dispatch protocols to the rural communities and to the primary highways are to the Minister of Health. To the minister: who may initiate a call requesting the most efficient ambulance response?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, those are certainly important issues, particularly in the rural areas. We have two complementary ambulance programs in this province. One is a ground ambulance program, and one is an air ambulance program.

In the case of ground ambulance service, the first call in an emergency should be to that local service. This call could be initiated by firemen, by police, or by members of the public. In every area they have a protocol as to how to respond.

If an air ambulance is required, the sending physician or designate places the call to dispatch, and a trained emergency response dispatcher makes arrangements for aircraft there. If they're on scene, accidents for example, a sending physician will consult with the receiving location, and they will transmit that information to dispatch, and dispatch will dispatch appropriately, whether it be rotary or fixed-wing.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health: is this response and the dispatch in the case of a time-dependent, life-threatening emergency speed related, economy related, or a combination of these considerations?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would say that the determination is made on one basis only, and that is patient care. The determining factors will be decided by the sending physician or emergency worker in discussions with the receiving party as to the most appropriate way to transport a person. So it is not a matter of economy or speed; it is that the most appropriate vehicle is used. Also included in that is that the most appropriate medical team or emergency team is dispatched with the patient.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health: in terms of the type of response, is the response in the case of a time-dependent, life-threatening emergency distance determined, and if so, what are the distance protocols?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, in the case of ground ambulance, in most cases a ground ambulance responds within its own service area, and if there are any difficulties, where an uncommon number of ambulances are used, they have reciprocating agreements with surrounding ambulances.

In the case of air ambulance there are distance protocols, Mr. Speaker, because there are distance limitations on a rotary emergency vehicle. They are generally considered most effective in a range of about 125 kilometres. That has to do with speed, and it also has to do with refueling. There are exceptions to that protocol, and those can be if there is fueling available or if there are extenuating circumstances, such as difficulty in ability to land a fixed-wing.

So the decision is made, Mr. Speaker, on the patient's condition and the distance that they have to travel and the conditions that they travel within.

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

Sales Tax

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Provincial Treasurer claimed that his government was working to ensure that any harmonized national sales tax would not lead to an increase in the rate paid in Alberta. Unfortunately, the Treasurer neglected to mention that the Leader of the Official Opposition had achieved in August of 1995 a commitment from the federal government that Alberta could opt out and only pay the federal portion of any harmonized sales tax. Moreover, the Provincial Treasurer failed to mention that his department's negotiating strategy appears to give away the family farm. I'm tabling four copies of a document entitled Options for Replacing the GST from Alberta Treasury, tax and fiscal policy, and four copies of a newspaper article which notes that the federal Minister of Finance extended exactly the same offer to the Provincial Treasurer. My questions are to the Provincial Treasurer. How can the Provincial Treasurer reconcile his tough line here in the Legislature when the briefing documents indicate a willingness to concede that the federal government can impose a higher levy and that his government is willing to accept a rebate of federal personal income taxes in lieu of a higher national sales tax rate levied in the province?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, what is entirely almost far too laughable is that the leader of the Liberal Party in this province would have any influence with the Minister of Finance in Ottawa.

DR. PERCY: The offer was made. Alberta can opt out.

My second question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Provincial Treasurer. How can the Provincial Treasurer reconcile the fact that he has either been unable to achieve a commitment of no higher harmonized sales tax in the province or that he has such a commitment and is unwilling to reveal it in the House, when the Leader of the Opposition achieved that in August of 1995?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, that's what's so extraordinarily laughable. The fact is that we got an indication from the federal Finance minister all the way along, and the Premier has had the same commitment from the Prime Minister that this province will not have to suffer a harmonized provincial sales tax any more than we have already. The fact is that the federal government already takes 7 percent out of every single Albertan's pocket whenever they go to the till. That's 7 percent far too much. They don't need that much. They don't need to take any if they'd get their spending in line with their revenues.

We've said all the way along, we've made it clear to the federal government all the way along that we would not be part of a harmonized system that involved the province receiving a nickel of sales tax, Mr. Speaker. We've made that clear. We've made that position.

As the federal Finance minister wanders around eastern Canada and talks to Atlantic Canadians about a 15 percent harmonized sales tax, the suggestion has come back that we may in Alberta have to face a 15 percent sales tax imposed by the Liberal government on Alberta. Mr. Speaker, let's be perfectly clear. This government, the people on this side of this Assembly, the Conservatives on this side of the Assembly will not have any truck or trade with a provincial sales tax that's imposed on Albertans.

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, as the Treasurer defends the Conservative GST, will he acknowledge that he has been given the opportunity that if a harmonized provincial sales tax is imposed, Alberta can opt out? That is on the table. Will he concede that?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, it was the Liberal Party who promised to eliminate the GST, and what are they doing today? They're going about the rest of the country promising to have a GST in Atlantic Canada of not 7 percent, not 10 percent; they're promising a 15 percent GST. That's what a Liberal government would do in Alberta. Let's be perfectly clear. This government's position is . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury.

Safety Services

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't all that long ago that safety services for building, fire, plumbing, and so on were provided by the provincial government and a few of our larger municipalities. Under the current Safety Codes Act these services are provided by a number of sources, and many of my constituents complain that they don't know who to go to. My question therefore is to the Minister of Labour. What plans are in place to ensure that consumers can easily find out not only who provides these services but how they can be accessed?

AN HON. MEMBER: Good question.

MR. DAY: It is a good question, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report that contrary to the way business has been done over decades in the past, Alberta citizens no longer have to stand in long lineups in provincial buildings to access safety services, as a matter of fact having a choice of municipalities or private-sector agencies that deliver those services. There are about 400 accredited agencies right now to deliver those services. That's private-sector jobs delivering the service to the citizens of Alberta.

Though people do appreciate that greater choice, they have indicated to us now that they need some kind of a directory to find out the wide variety of private-sector providers that are in their areas. So that has led us to establishing a fax-back system where anybody, any contractor, any citizen, with a fax machine can get in touch with any provincial Labour office or the Safety Codes Council for the list of numbers in their area, and that will be immediately faxed back to them.

2:10

MR. BRASSARD: Could the minister provide some idea of what this information is going to cost the Alberta taxpayer?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, given the savings that are already in the millions in terms of the provision of these services now in the private sector, the establishment of an actual fax-back system just links into our existing information system, and to set it up costs something along the order of \$400 to service the whole province. Ongoing costs, of course, will be the cost of actually returning a fax and the long-distance charges that are associated with it.

MR. BRASSARD: In that not all small businesses and contractors or suppliers carry fax machines around with them and may not even have access to a fax machine, how will these businesses get the information on service providers they need?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, individual citizens who don't have access to a fax machine can call the Safety Codes Council or the Labour office in their region or in fact their own municipality, since most municipalities are accredited. That information will be immediately given to them.

Human Rights Commission

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, a board which has the powers of a judge to determine fault and impose penalties ought to be independent. In our legal system the investigating police officer does not make the decision whether someone's guilty; otherwise, he'd have an obvious conflict of interest. But such a conflict is exactly what the Minister of Community Development has created in his Bill 24. The Human Rights Commission, which does the investigation of complaints, then calls itself a human rights panel and decides guilt and penalty. My question is to the minister responsible for human rights. Since in most other provinces there's a clear division between judge and investigator, why is this minister creating an Alberta commission to do both of these very different jobs?

MR. MAR: Well, the Human Rights Commission has done an outstanding job in the province of Alberta, and we expect that they will continue to do so. Mr. Speaker, 89 percent of Albertans feel that human rights are well protected in the province of

Alberta. We want to make improvements to the Human Rights Commission within Bill 24 that incorporate about 54 of the 75 recommendations that were made by the independent review panel that examined our Human Rights Commission and the Individual's Rights Protection Act of the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the investigation process, that process is conducted in an independent way, just as it is done in other provinces. So this Bill 24, which is referred to by the hon. member, will in fact provide a number of outstanding improvements to both the administrative side and the streamlining side of that administration as well as to the investigative process, and this government's committed to putting the appropriate amount of resources into doing that.

MR. DICKSON: The minister's reading a different Bill than I am.

Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question would be this: since the government's response last December to the Equal in Dignity report said that there would be a standing human rights panel, when and why did this minister change his mind?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, just as clarification, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo suggests that maybe we are reading from different pieces of legislation. I note here in their caucus news release issued today – here's one bullet. It says that the hon. member would purport to “remove a section which would leave Albertans open to \$10,000 fines if the Commission deemed their complaint to be frivolous.”

Mr. Speaker, I read this particular section out of the Act, section 11(2). That section says, “No person shall, with malicious intent, make a complaint under this Act that is frivolous or vexatious,” period. There is no reference in this particular Act to a fine of \$10,000, so perhaps the hon. member has not read the legislation and is in fact reading from a different piece of legislation.

MR. DICKSON: Well, the minister's answering a question I asked twice earlier.

My final question would be: what changes does this minister propose to the current selection process for those people that would be on the commission so that, in the words of the Equal in Dignity report, adjudicators will be “knowledgeable in human rights issues, legal issues, and have demonstrated personal integrity,” and the chairman will have a legal background.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that if the hon. member's calling into question the selection of the current members of the Human Rights Commission, then he is sadly mistaken. Those members have done an outstanding job.

We've done many things to address the issue of human rights in the province of Alberta. Charlach Mackintosh, the chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission at this time, had an extensive background in the areas of dispute resolution and mediation. As a consequence, Mr. Speaker, at the time that he assumed responsibility for the Human Rights Commission, there was an enormous backlog of cases; some 300 cases were in backlog. He's placed before the Human Rights Commission a plan to eliminate that backlog. We've in fact added five resource people from other parts of the department to deal with that backlog. We've recognized that the cases which are delayed in their hearing, in their adjudication really ought to be dealt with, and I'm happy to report that under this current plan by this fall that backlog will be eliminated.

We have a selection process that works well. We have an independent panel chaired by an individual named Bill Laurin from the city of Calgary. The people who have been put on the Human Rights Commission have in fact demonstrated a great knowledge of human rights and have also demonstrated their ability and their desire to learn more about human rights. Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the chief commissioner and the members of the Human Rights Commission have done an outstanding job in dealing with the backlog in other administrative issues as well as the substantive issues that are dealt with under the Individual's Rights Protection Act.

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

Occupational Health and Safety

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently hazardous work sites with 200-plus employees must have an RN for first aid response, and I understand that that is being changed. Also occupational health and safety regulations were changed so that work site injuries are no longer reported when the employee goes to emergency but after 48 hours of hospitalization. With early discharge policies now in place, these injuries are simply not being reported at all. My questions are to the Minister of Labour. Why is the minister proposing changes to the first aid planning and response regulations to leave it entirely up to the employer to develop and implement the plan?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, there have been changes proposed to the whole first aid planning and response regulations. Along those lines, the whole approach is one of partnership, not just an employer focus but in fact employees, whether it be nurses on a work site or whether it be work site safety officers, whatever it is, and industry associations. So good questions like the one the member has just raised are being dealt with not in isolation from just an employer point of view or just a government point of view but a partnership point of view, and they will continue to be addressed that way.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are 65,000 work sites in Alberta, I'd ask how the minister will accurately account for those work sites that have an inadequate first aid and emergency response plan.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, again the partnership process, working with employees and occupational health and safety people and also, the key here, with industry associations, provides a multiple level of feedback. If any of those partners perceive there to be a lack of any kind, then that feedback is available. Also, in cases where there may be situations where it appears that there does not seem to be responsible employer focus, then there are occupational health and safety monitoring processes that can be in place.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: is the minister assured that employers have the expertise to do a proper assessment of the hazards and first aid needs at the work site?

MR. DAY: Actually, along those lines, Mr. Speaker, there's an

accreditation process in place right now along the guidelines of first aid trainers, and that's available to employees. So those who for a variety of reasons may be lacking experience or education in that particular activity will be able to be upgraded and in fact take accreditation in that area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Pulp Mill Discharge

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The joint federal/provincial northern river basins study was undertaken to gauge the impact of pulp mills in municipalities on the quality of Alberta's northern rivers. This final report is expected in June of this year, but the draft reports do indicate a concern about the impact of discharges from pulp mills along these rivers. My question is to the Minister of Environmental Protection. What consideration did the minister give to the northern river basins study work to date when he made provisions last week for Slave Lake Pulp to expand its maximum planned capacity from 220,000 tonnes to 295,000 tonnes?

2:20

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the northern river basins study is not complete. We have had some preliminary assessment of the water quality within the river. It's very interesting to note that there are about four hot spots that have been identified, none of which have anything to do with a pulp mill. As a matter of fact, the preliminary reports indicate that the river is in better shape now - I'm speaking of the Athabasca River - with five pulp mills on it than it was back when there was only one pulp mill on it.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The scientists on that study still express concern.

Given that discharges from this mill reach the Athabasca River, where there are already concerns about oxygen supply for fish in winter, how will the minister ensure that there is no net increase in the burden on this river if or when the mill does complete its full expansion?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, it is important that in fact there is not an increased load, and we are planning on making sure that this happens, but I think that it's premature to judge what exactly will be coming out of the report. It's really interesting to note that the hot spots seem to be with hydrocarbons, and those could be and seem to be in at least two of the cases PCBs, which indicate that there has been some illegal dumping in the river, and we're attempting to identify those spots and in fact see what on earth did happen some time back.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that pulp mills do have an impact on the quality of Alberta's rivers, will the minister agree to use the northern river basins study results before he decides to approve a pulp and paper mill for Grande Alberta Paper at Grande Prairie?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the proposal in Grande Prairie would be a closed loop system and may not be putting any effluent into the river. Yeah, we will certainly be using the

information that is gained from the study before there are any licences issued.

We've got to also recognize the tremendous work that the industries are doing in improving their technology. As I indicated earlier, the load on the river has decreased dramatically over the last 25, 30 years as new technology comes on. Almost daily the technology is increasing and getting better. We've insisted in the province of Alberta that the best technology in the world will be used, and we will continue to insist on that.

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

Motion Picture Industry

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation unfortunately had to close its office because of this government's unwillingness to accommodate a long-range plan that would have provided stabilization for the film and television industry in Alberta and, Mr. Treasurer, would also have created the possibility for a proper privatization model for AMPDC. As a result, a \$3.2 million production by Minds Eye Pictures called the *Amazing Stories* studio is leaving Alberta and is going to Saskatchewan, as was predictable. To the minister of economic development: how many film or television projects have now been canceled and/or have departed Alberta to another province because of the unfortunate circumstances surrounding AMPDC?

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At one time the Member for Sherwood Park in fact referred to some music and some bands. Talking about questions, I welcome the question from the Grateful Red. As I have stated in this House before, at the point when the board of the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation delivered those recommendations to us to discontinue, to wind up operations, they stated that there were no equity applications on the table at that time. That is the information that remains constant today.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, the project I just mentioned is one of those.

I wonder if the minister would tell us what the economic loss and the job loss will be to Alberta as a result of canceled or exiting film/TV projects such as the *Amazing Stories* studio.

MR. SMITH: I can tell you that the funds that were in the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation are being used to fund *North of 60* and *Jake and the Kid* for this final year. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the government of Alberta, the taxpayers of Alberta will save over \$1 million a year by the discontinuing of this program.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I think the minister should tell Albertans how much they're going to lose as well, Mr. Speaker.

However, my final supplemental: what is the minister's plan to now help the film and television industry in Alberta, and how does he intend to prevent further devastation of this industry? What are you doing to help replace what's leaving?

MR. SMITH: Well, we may want to spend 15 minutes on the Alberta advantage, Mr. Speaker. In fact we may want to review industry sectors that have noted Alberta confidence by investing

in Alberta, such as Union Carbide and Nova. We can continue to affirm that members of the industry still have a viable presence in Alberta and will continue to do business in Alberta.

In fact, I can relate that the series *Viper* is being filmed in Airdrie, thanks to the co-operation and not the money of the office of the provincial film commissioner, which will continue to work actively with those economic development authorities in both Calgary and Edmonton that work hard to move major productions into Alberta. The infrastructure of the marketplace is strong, Mr. Speaker. The long-term funding, 1982-1996, has done its job. We have exited from the industry. We continue to provide a conducive environment for this industry to thrive in this province.

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

Education Funding

MR. HENRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've woken up the Minister of Education, and my questions are to him. Last June the minister announced approximately \$1.9 million to fund regional consortia. The stated objective of these consortia was to provide in-service training and professional development for teachers, school councils, and administrators in moving towards site-based decision-making and in moving towards the implementation of school councils. Now, the minister set up six regional consortia and established \$150,000 base funding and on from there, but unfortunately what's happened is that a substantial amount of this money is going to essentially what amounts to administration. The figures will show that out of the \$1.9 million, almost \$900,000 of that money is going for administration. So my question to the minister is: why was the 5 percent or 4 percent cap on administration that was imposed on school boards not imposed on the regional consortia?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the second question is really very relevant given that the first information was not quite correct. It is quite correct that we did put out a proposal that there be \$150,000 for a basic administrative centre for regional consortia, but we've also said, as a result of consultation with our stakeholders in education, that if they can do the administrative function for consortia for less money than that, we encourage them to do so. Any savings that they make there will be transferred into increasing the per pupil grant. So there's an incentive there, I think, in terms of that occurring.

I understand that in centres where consortia are going ahead, there are proposals coming forward – and I commend the jurisdictions involved – to offer free office space and to be creative in the way they house the administrative component, perhaps loaned staff. I think it's going well in those centres, and certainly they're to be commended for cutting down the administrative expenditure.

2:30

MR. HENRY: Well, I thank the minister for confirming the \$150,000 for administration, times six is \$900,000, which is what I said, Mr. Speaker.

My next question to the minister with regard to the consortia: given that the consortia's responsibility will be primarily brokering programs, how did you come to the determination that there would be six and not three or one, if we're going to have such a big overhead?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, six spread across this

province, for anybody that knows the geography of the province and the number of people involved, is actually I think a very efficient number. The reason for six, quite frankly, is in keeping with an overall administrative pattern or arrangement that had been there for some time where school boards had worked together on other matters, and that is that it was to suggest that it would be effective to organize consortia along the lines of the previous, and I think still continuing to some degree, six Alberta school board association zones.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. HENRY: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Then I'm wondering: given that 47 percent of this money acknowledged by the minister is going to administration, will the minister reconsider his cap on administration for large school boards that have a large administrative infrastructure to support a number of schools?

MR. JONSON: Now, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way gets to the real point and the real point of advocacy from across the way, and that is that he would like to see more money spent in administration across the education system of Alberta. I also find it somewhat ironic that he is making a point on behalf of the large jurisdictions in this province where surely they can come up with some economies of scale in terms of their administrative function. It would've been somewhat better received if he might have been referring to some of the small jurisdictions in the province where perhaps they don't have that economy of scale, Mr. Speaker.

When we look across the province, generally speaking – although I know that there are some that are expressing concerns about this because they do have some preferences to spend in this area – I find that school jurisdictions have taken up this particular challenge. There has been a very, very significant saving in administrative costs across the system, both through the regionalization effort and also through the work that school jurisdictions themselves have done to create greater efficiencies.

I think that this is one of our very sound recommendations and policies in the restructuring of education, Mr. Speaker, and it is rather ironic, as I said, that this seems to be perhaps the priority of the members opposite today.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

Constituent's Hospital Experience

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of all the problems that I as an MLA am called upon to assist with, intervention to secure necessary medical treatment is the most unsettling. The minister is quoted as saying that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the system. The experiences of my constituents tell me otherwise. The experience of Mrs. Lorraine Friesen of Devon has also drawn her to the conclusion that I share. She encouraged me to use her experience to illustrate how the system has put the bottom line ahead of providing health care. The following is a brief chronology of her recent health care ordeal.

On November 13 she was admitted to the U of A hospital to undergo major back surgery. On November 14 the operation was completed. On November 15 and 16 the unit nursing supervisor requested that she be transferred to the Devon hospital. November 21: she was transferred to the Devon hospital by ambulance.

December 12: she was discharged from the Devon hospital, still feeling nauseated and not feeling she was ready to be released. The doctor said that she was pressured to have her discharged. December 18: took a turn for the worse and was readmitted to the Devon hospital. December 21: discharged from the Devon hospital. December 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26: still not able to eat, very weak, always nauseated, just terribly sick. December 27: back to visit her orthopedic surgeon at the U of A. December 28: admitted to the Grey Nuns hospital; spent two nights in the emergency area. December 30: discharged and told to return January 3.

January 3: readmitted to the Grey Nuns hospital, housed in the emergency area. January 5: finally moved to nursing station 42. January 18: discharged in the afternoon.

This chronology was extracted from Mrs. Friesen's journal. It's not an isolated case. Mrs. Friesen's ordeal is reflective of the disarray within the health care sectors. It illustrates the intense pressure the medical practitioners are forced to perform under. These pressures are hampering the sound treatment of Albertans. The system is clearly not working as the minister claims.

Child Welfare

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, it's been almost a year since I was elected to office as an MLA. During this period I've heard several criticisms and allegations from my colleagues on the other side of the floor who have alleged that child welfare services are in a state of crisis. As a former child welfare worker who has had extensive involvement with social workers, I am indeed offended by the opposition members' constant damning of social workers' ability to provide professional services to the children and families of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is committed to developing one of the most advanced early intervention programs in the country, one that works very closely with the community and the people involved. We are pursuing a very proactive strategy in assisting families, a strategy that would not be successful without the social workers we have.

We know they are facing pressures, Mr. Speaker. The government is taking steps to give these workers the support they need. Spending in the area of welfare is going up by \$35 million, and the department has plans to hire 75 more child welfare workers by May 1 of this year.

A well-trained and experienced staff team is essential for child welfare delivery. We have this team in our province, Mr. Speaker. I know this from experience. I know that it is because of their training, professionalism, and dedication that our child welfare services are not in a state of crisis. The additional support and staff the minister has committed will serve to increase the high quality of services offered in this province and help assure Albertans that our child welfare services are not in a state of crisis, as some would have them believe.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to commend our child welfare workers for their commitment to serving the people of Alberta. I invite all Albertans to join me in saluting our child welfare workers.

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

Employment Stability

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The nature of employment and unemployment has changed dramatically in recent years, far beyond what any statistics would reveal. Those

fortunate enough to be employed now face less job security, often facing an increasingly demanding workload and expectations for more than a full day's work for a full day's pay.

Unemployment statistics tend to mask the job seeker's new reality, which includes very tight job markets, much longer times between jobs, the need to possess much more sophisticated job search skills, and the eager willingness to work for less pay.

A recent Angus Reid poll shows growing public disillusionment and discontent with corporate behaviour. Over three-quarters of those polled said that they disapprove of large, profitable corporations that lay off employees and believe that firms should be legally required to help workers retrain and search for new jobs.

Government must not mimic corporate behaviour. Government must adhere to the principle that each and every one of its citizens is a shareholder, a constraint not shared by private interests.

In my own constituency the staff of the largest employer, Alberta Hospital Edmonton, feel that their jobs are under threat and are set to meet with the Provincial Mental Health Board a week from today. In their words, they want to know what is going to happen to them. Mr. Speaker, they, like most Albertans, do not expect miracles. They only request assurance that they will be dealt with fairly as employees who have served their employer with commitment and proficiency rather than as a government's moving budget target.

Although the quickest way to improve the bottom line is to lay people off, as this government has done, Albertans expect more from their government. They expect to be treated fairly, honestly, and with dignity. That challenge still remains.

Mr. Speaker, it is an important time for government to listen and to care to their shareholders. Their customers wouldn't want anything less. I recall door-knocking during the 1993 campaign and being invited into the living room of one of my constituents. He made comments which I remember clearly to this day. He said, "I would gladly accept a 5 percent wage cut if I knew it would secure a job for my neighbour."

Mr. Speaker, this government has fulfilled only the first part of his request.

head:

Orders of the Day

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Third Reading**

2:40

Bill 205 Limitations Act

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to move third reading of Bill 205, the Limitations Act.

It's really a double pleasure for me to do that on April 2, 1996, because 29 years ago today my eldest son was born. So happy birthday, David.

The principles of Bill 205 have received widespread support from interested parties and professional groups. I would first like to thank the members of this Assembly for the unanimous support of this Bill at second reading and to thank also the Minister of Justice and his very capable staff and certainly our very capable research staff as well for their diligent work on this Bill.

Throughout the Bill process I've consulted extensively with professional organizations and interested groups and have worked

with the Member for Calgary-Buffalo to address certain concerns regarding this Bill. Today we have a better, more inclusive and comprehensive piece of limitations legislation.

Mr. Speaker, to clarify for the members of this Assembly, Bill 205, the Limitations Act, is in response to outdated limitations legislation that is in serious need of reform. In fact, what started this whole process was constituents who could not get due process under the old law. Bill 205 is based on the model created by the Alberta Law Reform Institute, who have vetted their recommendations to various professional associations and interest groups.

To reiterate, limitations law is the body of rules applied to civil proceedings which limits the time available to a person to bring a claim against another person for an alleged violation of a legal right. The objective of a limitation system is to encourage the timely resolution of legal controversies and to provide a balance between the rights of claimants, defendants, and the public at large.

Bill 205 does just that, Mr. Speaker. It provides claimants with a reasonable amount of time to discover that they have a cause of action against someone else, while at the same time it protects potential defendants from stale claims being brought forward. Currently our limitation system provides varying limitation periods for different causes of actions. These are varying limitation periods for actions in tort, contract, and against medical and other practitioners. Bill 205 simplifies the system and remedies these inconsistencies by providing standard limitation periods for all claims. This levels the playing field for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, two standard limitation periods are established under Bill 205, the two-year discovery period and the 10-year ultimate limitation period. Under the traditional rule of law the limitation period begins to run when the act occurs. The two-year discovery period created under Bill 205 will begin when the claimant either discovered or ought to have discovered knowledge of his or her claim. This provides a remedy for situations where a claimant could not be aware that he or she had a claim until long after the cause of action arose.

This Bill is consistent with recent Canadian case law that established that a discovery period is an acceptable and reasonable provision in limitations law. The discovery period is balanced by a 10-year ultimate limitation period in Bill 205. This is the maximum length of time during which a claim may be brought forward. The ultimate period protects potential defendants from possible legal action indefinitely.

After the 10-year period the defendant may use the ultimate limitation defence to argue against a claim. The ultimate limitation period frees potential defendants from the economical and psychological burdens of the endless possibility of legal action. In addition, a maximum limitation period allows potential defendants to anticipate possible legal responsibilities and reduces record maintenance and insurance premiums.

Mr. Speaker, there is little consensus on what the proper length of time for the ultimate limitation period should be. I would remind all members of the Assembly that statistics show that 95 percent of all claims are brought forward within five years of completion of a professional service. The 10-year ultimate limitation period under Bill 205 is twice as long as experience shows is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, reform of Alberta's limitations laws is long overdue. I would like, once again, to thank the members of this Assembly for recognizing the need to reform Alberta's limitation legislation and for supporting Bill 205.

Thank you.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak very briefly in support of Bill 205 on third reading. The limitations as they currently have been in practice can put many, many professional categories under a very, very unfair advantage, as the mover of the Bill had originally indicated, whether it be engineering firms, whether it be architectural firms. My son, being an architect, has spoken in the past with me on the implications that arise as a result of the additional pressures from insurance companies because of the threat of lawsuits that could occur years and years and years down the road. Some would argue that even maybe 10 years is long in comparison to other jurisdictions, but I think the member has found a reasonable balance.

There is a concern. I would hope there are provisions – and from my interpretation of the Bill there are – that protect those persons who are classified as being nonadult who years down the road come forth with charges that may deal with sexual harassment, sexual abuse, those types of situations that seem to occur more and more. But the member seems to have captured a provision to allow for those possibilities as well.

So from the point of view of a private member's Bill, I think it's been well drafted, and it's a Bill that this member of this particular caucus can support.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a third time]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole
2:50

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

Bill 208
Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1996

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin to address some of the questions throughout second reading, I wish to thank all members of the Assembly who supported the concept in Bill 208. Over the last week to 10 days I have heard from many volunteer firemen who are very pleased that things went so well in second reading. I particularly thank the 11 members who spoke in favour of Bill 208, and I would hope that we can move through Committee of the Whole as quickly and as expediently as we did in second reading.

I will address those questions that were asked by the members opposite. First, I would like to deal with the question asked by the hon. Member for Leduc. I was pleased that the hon. member had talked to Bill McKay, who is the executive director of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and who indicated to the member that they were in support of this Bill and had certainly worked with us.

He also asked about liability. The provisions within the Highway Traffic Act such as section 68.1, which in fact does allow emergency vehicles to contravene the rules of the road, would have no bearing on the operation of the vehicles as referred to in Bill 208. Section 59.1(2) of the Bill specifically states that the vehicle is "other than an emergency vehicle." As the vehicles are not emergency vehicles, the normal rules of the road would apply to the operation of these vehicles as would the normal rules respecting liability for accidents. This being the case, if a firefighter causes damage as a result of his or her negligent

operation of the vehicle, that firefighter would be liable, and if the owner is different from the operator, the owner of the vehicle would also be liable.

Given that the Highway Traffic Act as amended will specifically authorize the use of the lamps, it is not very likely that the use of the lamp itself will lead to liability for a municipality or a firefighter in those situations where it is being used as authorized; that is, when the vehicle is proceeding to a fire or another emergency. However, it would have to be borne in mind that the use of the lamps does not confer any special privilege to the firefighter; for example, in respect to compliance with traffic lights, stop signs, et cetera.

It would certainly be advisable for any municipality that utilizes voluntary firefighters, or full-time firefighters who might use this light in their vehicle to respond to emergencies, to review its liability coverage with its insurance agent. Because the authorized firefighter cannot operate a vehicle in contravention of this Act, the regulations, or a municipal bylaw, I find it difficult to think of a situation where damages could be attributed to the flashing green light itself. In summary, in essence firefighters would not be any more liable in case of an accident occurring en route to an emergency situation, whether they have a flashing green light in their personal vehicle or not.

I thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for his remarks, and he did talk about the deputy fire chief of Hinton, who was very much in favour of the Bill. I don't think, hon. Member for West Yellowhead, I'll touch the remark you made about what lurks in my heart or other parts of my body.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talked about public education, and this of course is very necessary to ensure that people are aware of what in fact the green light means and what is involved. I have talked to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities, and he has assured me that all of the information coming out of that department – the safety manuals, driving training manuals, dangerous goods manuals – will certainly have this information put into it and inserted so the public are aware. Because this authorization must come from the municipality by bylaw, they too will play a very important part in the public awareness and the education that will take place, and we will work with them in that regard.

The hon. Member for St. Albert again talked about public education and did say that we must give volunteer firefighters every advantage possible. With your endorsement of this Bill, we will do that.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park talked about regulations, and I would just like to address that for a moment. He had some concerns regarding where this Bill would fit into the existing Highway Traffic Act. He suggested that perhaps Bill 208 should not go under section 59.1 of the Highway Traffic Act and suggested that perhaps it would fit better under section 17.1 of the Act. I think the hon. member made a very good point, and I would like to explain why we chose to put it in under section 59.1. We looked at this section specifically because it deals with other equipment in the Act. The proposed flashing green light would not be a permanent part of the volunteer firefighter's personal vehicle. The flashing green light would be portable, mobile, and transferable and could be passed to other members of the volunteer fire department. Although, yes, section 59.1 would be added to the Highway Traffic Act, this does not mean that it is related to section 59 of the Act.

The hon. member is correct when he says that section 59 deals with sirens. This section reads as follows: "No vehicle other than

an emergency vehicle shall, while on a highway, be equipped with a siren." Section 59.1, however, is not related to this section but indeed would stand alone. We felt that it would make sense to have a section regarding portable lights right after portable sirens.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park also inquired as to why full-time firefighters were included in this legislation. Full-time firefighters will certainly not be using this light to the extent that volunteers would, but we wouldn't want to preclude them. There could be times when they are called from their homes to go directly to the scene of an accident, fire, or emergency. It will be up to the municipality where the full-time firefighters are employed to decide whether or not they want to enact and have the flashing green lights available to the full-time firefighters. Basically, we did not want to preclude them.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that I have answered all of the questions as indicated to me during debate on second reading. Again, I thank all the members of the Assembly. I look forward to further debate, and possibly we can say that green lights are a go.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Bonnyville.

MR. VASSEUR: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak in favour of proposed Bill 208. Any piece of legislation that comes forward that will enhance the ability of a volunteer fire department to perform their duties will be supported by me personally and, from what I've heard so far, by most people in the Legislature. From experience, I've had numerous contacts with a volunteer fire department, and I can tell you that they do their work from a very deep commitment. It's the only way that fire protection or a fire department can operate in a rural area or in a small urban setting.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

There has never been the luxury of enough money to have paid people on staff in most of the rural departments, including towns the size of Bonnyville, where I come from. These people that have been on the volunteer department are very, very committed to their task, to the extent where they have excelled in training not only themselves but training other people, other members, other volunteer departments in the areas. Anything that will come forward to enhance that ability to provide that service has to be commended. Also, from experience the volunteer departments that I've met over the years have not only done an exceptional job, but they have gone beyond the call of duty and have assisted other jurisdictions neighbouring them.

3:00

From our neck of the woods we were able to develop a volunteer fire department that I believe now represents the largest area in Alberta. It started servicing the community of Bonnyville only and then, through agreement in the mid-80s, incorporated the municipality of Bonnyville, took over some summer villages by agreement, and in the early part of 1990-91 was able to negotiate some agreements with the private sector, basically Imperial Oil, Amoco, and the people in the oil industry. We did that because there was always the question of revenue to operate. It was always a tight budget, and with contributions from the other municipalities and with agreement from these other municipalities, we were able to reach agreement with the private sector because of the revenue coming in, therefore enhancing their ability to provide that service.

The other area that I'd like to comment on is the area of public awareness. The question has been brought forward by a couple of members before, and the sponsor of the Bill, the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, has indicated that the government will commit to provide this public awareness that is required. It's fine to say that we'll allow the green lights to flash on these vehicles, and I have no problem with it. The fact that these green lights are going to be in place and making the police department aware that these people are speeding for a reason is great, but we have a responsibility to make the public aware of that fact. We can certainly have some programs through the schools to make sure that the questions that are being asked by the students or the young kids on what those flashing green lights are can be answered. Within a matter of a short time I would suspect that with the proper public awareness programs and with a reasonable amount of dollars spent on it, this can be achieved rather quickly.

With those comments, again, I support the proposed legislation, and I'll allow someone else to speak.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had the opportunity to make some short comments during second reading of Bill 208, and I intend to again go on record stating my support during the Committee of the Whole portion or stage of this Bill.

During the second reading I had specifically asked the Member for Lacombe-Stettler a question, and I don't know if she's had the opportunity - maybe she replied while I had to go out there and return a couple of phone calls. That was dealing with abuse of the legislation and if there were any penalties for someone who may be using the green light when they're not really on, let's say, green light business; in other words, abusing that system and taking advantage of the green flashing light they would have on their vehicle. That of course would violate the intent of the Bill, and there should be some type of penalty that would recognize that that type of action would not be tolerated.

The Member for Bonnyville spoke about the public awareness. Certainly there has to be public awareness with this type of new legislation when it is proclaimed. We can even see this in the city at the present time, where the emergency services are not provided on a volunteer basis but rather provided by paid, trained, so-called professional persons that respond to emergencies as a livelihood. Even at that and even with the great awareness that has been created in the larger municipalities like Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Medicine Hat, so on and so forth, there are still many, many instances where people don't know what they're supposed to do. Motorists don't know what they're supposed to do when a vehicle comes from behind them with its lights flashing. They don't know if they should stop right on the spot where they are, if they should pull over to the right. In some instances they feel it's more practical maybe to pull over to the left, but we all know the rule of thumb is that you are to pull over to the right. At least that's always been my interpretation of it: pull over to the right.

I can recall an instance when I was on the Edmonton city council where a fellow driving down 50th Street saw an emergency vehicle behind him and pulled over to the right like he should have. That emergency vehicle chose to attempt to pass him on the right and of course hit him in the rear end, causing extensive damage. The city did not want to recognize the liability involved and cover the damages to the innocent party. He fought

that, and he won that. So even with the awareness that has been created in the larger municipalities, where emergency services are par for the course, there are those difficulties. The Member for Bonnyville has raised a very, very valid point when he talks in terms of the need for public awareness.

I think it's important, Mr. Chairman, that we recognize the areas that we're talking about in terms of the green flashing light, those individuals who would benefit by it besides those who would have emergency services responding to them in a quicker period of time hopefully. We have to recognize that those persons engaged in the emergency services are volunteers, so we have to go out of our way to accommodate them and try to make their volunteer activity, which is there to save the lives of other persons and reduce property damage – it's to the benefit of society. It's of benefit to Albertans, so we of course have to accommodate them as far as possible. This is a step in the direction of accommodating them and making life that much easier for them as they go about their volunteer duties responding to an emergency situation.

I'm going to conclude on that note, Mr. Chairman, and again commend the Member for Lacombe-Stettler for bringing this Bill forward. It recognizes that the system of private Bills brought forward by private members can work if the Bill is reasonable. This particular caucus is a very, very positive caucus that is eager to support Bills that are worthy of support, and this is an example of one of those types of Bills. So on that note I'll conclude so other members of caucus have the opportunity to express their passion for this Bill.

Thank you.

MRS. FORSYTH: Oh, oh. Mr. Decore has a point.

MR. DECORE: I don't know who the squeaky voice in the back – I'm not used to a squeaky voice in the back. I'm used to a squeaky voice out front but not behind.

Mr. Chairman, I first want to make some comments about volunteer firefighters and full-time firefighters. This amendment has appropriately involved both full-time and volunteer firefighters, and I just want to give the Assembly a personal experience that I had to show agreement and to give agreement to why full-time firefighters should be involved.

I think the worst experience that I had as the mayor of Edmonton was to deal with the tornado. You can imagine that the roadways were so badly clogged and the system in such complete chaos that helicopters were needed to take me to the site at a particular time, because you simply couldn't make your way through the street system.

3:10

In those instances there is a need for a call to be put out to firefighters, and in that particular case there had to be a call put out to get extra manpower and womanpower to be able to deal with the serious problems of death and carnage and fire and everything that occurred during that tornado. You need to move people quickly to that kind of an emergency situation to look after the needs of the public. So this is a good provision, and it isn't just part-time firefighters but it is full-time firefighters that need that ability to move quickly.

Mr. Chairman, I have some difficulty, though, with the fact that this amendment does not define "other emergency." One of the sad experiences of the tornado was to walk about the Evergreen trailer park the next day and to discover that a health official had misused his authority and used his identification to take his vehicle

onto the site of the Evergreen trailer park to show his family what had happened in the trailer park. I couldn't believe it. I happened to know this person and asked what they were doing, and I was given this explanation: they were going to an emergency. I think this clogged the system. This was a situation that was unwarranted. My difficulty, then, is: what is an emergency? What is an emergency to a full-time or a part-time firefighter?

Growing up in Vegreville, I remember that the river increasing in size was an emergency because Vegreville usually got flooded out in the flats. Is a firefighter putting on the green light on his car driving to see if the river is rising an emergency? Is an emergency a firefighter putting on the green lamp on his car and driving to a tornado site to have a look around? These are problems I see that need to be dealt with, and I wish the word "emergency" had been defined.

I looked in the Highway Traffic Act, and the Act does not define emergency. Maybe through this debate we can alert municipalities that they should grapple with that particular problem. To me an emergency is some act of God or force that occurs that requires the attention of this firefighter to be there. It's not a look-see. It isn't something that's sort of individual. It's something that is part of a team and shouldn't be abused.

Mr. Chairman, I want the hon. member who's introducing this Bill to tell me why she thought it was necessary to do it in an amending Bill form rather than to do it simply by regulation, which my interpretation of the Bill allows, the Highway Traffic Act allows. By way of example, it's my interpretation of the Highway Traffic Act that that's exactly the way the yellow flashing light was introduced and used. There is no special provision or Bill on yellow traffic lights. If it is simply to highlight to the public the need for this, I'd like that explanation, because remember that we're dealing with a government that likes to do things by regulation almost completely and entirely. So this is a situation that's out of sync with the philosophy of the government.

The issue of insurance continues to bother me, Mr. Chairman, because the green light allows this firefighter to speed or to circumvent – well, the hon. member is shaking her head. I don't care what you say; there are some liberties that are allowed to people in this situation who are attempting to get to an emergency. People will pull over. I think yield signs or yields will be interpreted in a different way.

I'd like a further and better comfort from the hon. member that the Insurance Bureau, particularly the Insurance Bureau, and the Fire Fighters Association, which she says she's conferred with – I want to know how this issue of risk is going to be dealt with, because clearly to me there is greater risk involved. There's traffic moving in ways that it doesn't usually move. People have to give way, and when you give way, other things happen. So risk occurs, damage occurs, and is the Insurance Bureau completely satisfied with that situation? I'd like a further and more complete explanation of that situation.

So, Mr. Chairman, I support this. I have some difficulties with some of the provisions in the Act. Perhaps those can be allayed by the hon. member giving me some better information.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I call on the next member, could I have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, if any? Carried.

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

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the committee five community-minded citizens from the constituency of Highwood. They're attending the AAMDC conference here in the city. First of all, Reeve Flores Groeneveld, councillors Wayne Berglund, Roy McLean, and Jim Tanner, and the chief administrative officer, Harry Riva-Cambrin. They have risen in the gallery. Would you please accord them the usual warm welcome.

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

Bill 208
Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1996
(*continued*)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to join the debate and to make a few comments in support of Bill 208, on the green flashing lights for volunteer firefighters. The discussion, as I've listened in the Assembly the last little while, has focused almost exclusively on the firefighters and their use or misuse of the lights and the legalities surrounding the use of those lights. I'd like to spend a couple of minutes looking at the Bill from a different perspective, and that's the perspective of property owners, people who live in those locales which depend on volunteer fire departments as their only source of help should tragedy strike.

Being one of those part-time residents in a rural part of the province, you feel very, very vulnerable. As good homeowners you take the best precautions you can to make sure that should fire strike, you're prepared. You do your best to make sure that the water system, the water supply is going to be secure. You do your best with extinguishers around the residence, making sure that escape ladders are in place from second-storey bedrooms and living areas, and making sure that the exits are usable by residents. But you do all those things within the context of knowing full well that you are very, very vulnerable should fire strike.

You're reminded how vulnerable you are in a number of ways. Just getting insurance on a part-time rural residence can be a difficult task in itself. One of the first questions that the insurance company wants to know is: how far are you from a fire hall? What time would it take for a fire department to get to the residence? In many cases fire coverage is only available under a primary residence policy. You have to find an insurance company that will allow you to tack on coverage for a temporary residence under your primary residence policy.

So there's a feeling of vulnerability that many part-time rural residents feel in terms of fire fighting and fire departments. I see the green flashing light as just one more piece of equipment that will help in case of an emergency. I think for most people in the rural parts of the province and those areas that are served by voluntary fire departments, that's the way they'll view this Bill, that this Bill will add to their peace of mind in an area that can be and should be an area of great anxiety for them.

So I applaud the member for bringing forth the Bill. I think with all the kinds of technicalities that are raised and all the reservations that are brought forward, the bottom line is it's a good idea. If it's a good idea and it helps save lives and it helps make Albertans feel more secure, it's one that, regardless of those technicalities, we can make work. So I support it and again thank the member for bringing it forward.

Thank you.

3:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I listened to the debate this afternoon, and this is the first opportunity I've had to rise and speak to Bill 208. I as well would like to speak in support of it and make a couple of comments and perhaps maybe ask the sponsor of this Bill a couple of questions.

DR. TAYLOR: Excuse me. A point of order.

Point of Order
Questioning a Member

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes.

DR. TAYLOR: I'm just wondering if the member would entertain a question.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, yes or no.

MR. CHADI: I'm not sure I should, but I will.

Debate Continued

DR. TAYLOR: This is a very important Bill, this little light business. I'm just wondering if the reason he's speaking in favour of this is that he wants one for his Ferrari.

MR. CHADI: Mr. Chairman, I would gladly oblige by answering the question if I only had heard a reference to *Beauchesne* or Standing Orders. In the absence of such, I think I'd like to continue.

You know, listening to the debate here this afternoon, I can relate to many of the speakers that have spoken to Bill 208, particularly with respect to personal incidents that they can recall where this amendment would have come into good use. Mr. Chairman, I can speak from experience in my own community, especially after listening to the Member for Bonnyville speak. I can recall that in my hometown of Lac La Biche what we had for years and years was a siren. That siren would go off in that little town, and you'd see the volunteer firefighters dropping whatever they were doing. If they were changing a tire at the tire shop, for argument's sake, you'd see the tools drop from their hands, and they'd run towards the fire station. The dedication was just incredible. Although I've never been involved in a volunteer firefighter brigade or group, I've often wondered about their dedication and the fun that I suspect they had doing it, the excitement of it, the assistance in helping people, the gratitude that the individuals gave these firefighters.

I can recall starting a grass fire when I was a youngster. It came so close to the house; as a matter of fact, the porch of our house on the acreage almost caught fire. It wasn't unusual because most individuals, particularly youngsters, like the idea of

nice green grass in the springtime, when you can burn that dead grass. Just in a couple or three weeks you'd end up with nice lush green grass all around, so it wasn't unusual for us to want to light these fires and get some green grass to play on. But when I lost control of that fire that day and I called the fire department, it was incredible how quickly they responded and how with vigour and their dedication they put that fire out and how grateful I was. I never thought for a moment of the trouble they would have in getting to those emergencies or to those areas that required their presence. I never thought, until I saw this amendment, how important it would be for somebody to have something that would identify that this is an emergency, that they need to proceed quicker than the normal flow of traffic.

In smaller communities I suspect this probably wouldn't be of a great deal of concern because they're not really burdened with the street systems with traffic lights and a lot of stop signs and yield signs. In a small community they normally can proceed through that rather quickly, but in larger sized towns such as Bonnyville, St. Paul, perhaps maybe places like Vermilion and, in southern Alberta, perhaps even Brooks – I suspect that even Brooks would have a volunteer fire department – that would be required. I would think they would have to have something that would identify them as being an emergency vehicle.

The public awareness issue was discussed. How would we have people identify that green light with this type of an emergency situation? I know, for argument's sake, that the police would use a blue and red, and if I'm not mistaken, for the longest time it was just a red flashing light. Now they've gone to something like a blue and red light combination. I know that the transportation department and those snowplows use the amber lights, and even big trucking companies use that for identification of wide loads, et cetera. So that is easily recognizable on the highways. With the green light though – and perhaps the sponsor could answer this – I'm wondering: would that be a light that would be consistent throughout the province? Would it be something that, let's say, a manufacturer would create so that you don't have some that flash perhaps maybe brighter or perhaps maybe slower or faster than others? Would it be something that would be consistent throughout this province?

Also, I'm wondering if other jurisdictions throughout Canada have such a thing. I suspect that if there were other jurisdictions throughout Canada or perhaps maybe even North America, Mr. Chairman, I know the sponsor would like to know this, and I would like to know it, if she could respond to that. So that we're not confusing the issue for people from outside of this province seeing the green light and not knowing what it was, if there were other jurisdictions that could identify with it, well, that would be something we would have to of course try to be consistent with.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenarry spoke about insurance. This is a real concern I think the sponsor of the Bill should really look into and investigate a little more, because I suspect there will be individuals . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper, but under Standing Order 8(2)(b) the time has elapsed for Committee of the Whole.

3:30

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee do now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain Bill. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 208.

THE SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Youth Crime Prevention

506. Ms Hanson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize that when children begin to commit crime, it is often a reflection of a number of factors including poor supervision and weak parenting skills, and therefore establish a series of mandatory early intervention programs to help parents manage their children.

[Debate adjourned March 26: Mr. Bracko speaking]

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

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 506. One of the problems I see with this motion is that it assumes that the government should solve social problems. There is no way that the government can solve social problems. It also assumes that the government should impose one set of standards for everyone. Government should not impose sets of standards for everyone.

In fact, we have quite different circumstances across the province. For instance, if we look at Medicine Hat, we have a situation where we have a lot of seniors and elderly people living there. If we look at Fort McMurray, they have a lot of younger people living there. So what we have is that you cannot have standards that go right across the province. This is the same for child care. You have different needs for children in various parts of the province. The needs that children have in the northern part of the province are different than in the southern part of the province. For instance, I'm told that in northern Alberta there are still places where young people go to school being pulled by horses or on skidoos. You don't have that . . .

MR. CHADI: Skidoos? What are they?

DR. TAYLOR: Skidoos? Snow machines. We used to call them skidoos in the old days, Mr. Speaker, for some of the younger members that don't remember skidoos.

So what we're saying, Mr. Speaker, is that because of the different situations in different parts of the province, government cannot impose standards right across the province.

As well, the government should not be involved in telling families what they should or should not do. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, the responsibility of raising children is the parents'. That's where the buck stops. The buck must stop with the parental responsibility. What we should be doing is working towards a situation in which people are responsible for their own

actions, responsible for their own lives.

Motion 506 would create communities which would turn to government for answers on social problems to solve their own concerns. That's exactly what we're trying to move away from, if you see what we're doing in terms of the 17 child welfare regions. We want the communities to be self-sufficient. We want the communities to develop their own programs that suit the needs of the community, and there's no better place to do that than at the grassroots level. We do not want communities to become dependent on the government to find solutions. In fact, this is what we as a government for the last three years have been working against. We've been trying to encourage and we have, I believe, encouraged communities to become self-sufficient as opposed to putting the responsibility on government.

The early intervention program mentioned by my colleagues on this side of the House not only works closely with the communities and families across Alberta, but it sets out a framework in which communities will have the flexibility and decision-making ability to address local issues and needs. One of the reasons this program is successful is because it is flexible and includes flexible programming. Successful services are built around the types of families in the particular community. Unlike what is proposed by this motion, it does not tend to fit families into programs. Rather, what we would like to see is programs fitting families, and I think that's quite a different approach than this motion initiates.

The other thing, of course, is the mandatory nature. We have to be very careful. The motion says, "therefore establish a series of mandatory early intervention programs to help parents." Once again, Mr. Speaker, it's legislating that parents must attend an early intervention program. I believe in early intervention programs. In fact, I've been involved in writing early intervention programs. One program I wrote while involved in one country in the world, in Australia, is still in practice. Another professor and myself wrote something called the extended experience program. We started a preschool with mainly aboriginal children in the outback in Australia in a place called Burke, but there were a number of white children at risk as well involved in the program. That program is still operated today some 25 years after we wrote the program and started that preschool. So I have some experience in this.

We did not go to the aboriginal children and the children from white homes that were at risk and say: you must attend this. Quite frankly, that gets people's backs up. What we did was we went into the aboriginal community and said: "Your children and the teachers and you are telling us as a community that your children are having difficulty in certain areas. One of the areas they're having difficulty with is the school system. We can help your children be successful in the school system." So we went and talked to and convinced the aboriginal parents.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're here to help.

DR. TAYLOR: But we weren't from the government. We were there to help, but we weren't from the government.

We convinced these parents and sold them on the concept. We didn't go knock on their doors and say, "You must attend, must have your children there," because quite frankly they wouldn't have done it. I see the same situation here because this is mandatory. As soon as you start mandating that people must do this, the program won't work. You get people in the program that don't want to be there.

As well, I can speak from some experience I have had here in

North America working with families. I've had extensive experience in that area. One of the things I found in working with families was that when the families came, if everybody was there on a voluntary basis, the mediation would tend to work. But if one of the spouses insisted that the other spouse be there on a mandatory basis, under threats like, "If you don't come, I'm divorcing you," then quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the mediation didn't work. If the children were there because they were threatened with some kind of consequences for not being there, then the mediation did not work. We have to be very clear on this: mandatory mediation does not work; mandatory intervention does not work. You have to have people who are committed to the program before any program of intervention will work. You get that commitment by going out and selling your program. You don't get that commitment by mandating the program.

I will not be able to support this motion because of the mandatory nature of it. I do recognize the importance of early intervention, and it works if it's done properly and through the right circumstances. I believe that's what our government is about. We're about creating early intervention programs for people that want to be involved in them. We're about creating early intervention programs and encouraging people to be involved in them. We are not about creating intervention programs and mandating that people be involved in them.

Quite frankly, that's a fundamental difference between a Liberal and a Conservative position. A Conservative position believes that people in society must take individual responsibility for their actions. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, even you are responsible for your actions. I know that may seem hard to believe, sitting in that great chair of yours, but ultimately you are. You have to take responsibility for your actions, just as I also have to take responsibility for my actions. But the Liberal way is to make the government responsible. So instead of saying to the parent, "You're responsible," they say, "No, the government is responsible." It's somebody else's fault.

You see this consistently in our school system. You see children come through the school system and get caught in some misbehaviour, and it's not their fault. In fact, I can tell you a story of exactly this, Mr. Speaker, where a young lady, a senior high student, was assaulting a junior high boy. A teacher instructed that young person to stop the assault, and she continued the assault. The teacher put his hand on her shoulder, and she turned and hit the teacher, knocking the teacher's glasses off. The teacher put this grade 12 girl in an armlock and took the girl down to the office, and they called the police and the parents. Well, what happened was that the parents came. And you know what? They were Liberals. I could tell they were Liberals because they said: "It's not our daughter's fault; it's the teacher's fault. It's not our daughter's fault; it's the school system's fault."

3:40

The teacher and the principal were Conservatives. They were saying: "No. Your daughter must take responsibility for this action. You as parents must take responsibility for your daughter." But they wouldn't take it. They went so far as wanting the police – the police were there, of course – to press charges against this teacher, but on hearing the situation, the police of course realized that they would not press charges against this teacher. You see, they were Conservative too, because they saw that it was the parents' and the student's fault. The parents then – and this is a true story – went and found a Liberal lawyer, and that lawyer pressed charges against this teacher. [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired]

Could I have unanimous consent to continue, Mr. Speaker? Unanimous consent requested.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. Standing Orders do require me, unfortunately, to interrupt the hon. member. The time limit has expired, and I must now put all questions necessary to conclude debate on Motion 506.

[Motion lost]

Federal/Provincial Seniors' Programs

507. Mrs. Hewes moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish jointly with the federal government a one-stop help office for seniors.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DUNFORD: Now, there's a Liberal.

MRS. HEWES: Yes, a Liberal.

I rise to move Motion 507 on the Order Paper. Mr. Speaker, in moving this and writing this motion, I think there's a tremendous amount of evidence that is appearing in this province and across this country as to why we need such an activity.

I should say at the outset that I understand from correspondence from the Member for Calgary-Currie that that member intends to propose an amendment which, having had a look at it, I think is a friendly amendment and perhaps will clarify the motion even further.

Mr. Speaker, there have been some major changes made in services to seniors in the last few years in the province of Alberta. My concern with them, as to how they were made – and I've described this on a number of occasions – is that the government broke a contract with seniors. There were programs that seniors had anticipated. They had planned their retirement, had made their investments, and had developed their estate in order to live a certain lifestyle. Suddenly this contract was broken, and things were changed for them. It's my view that it caused a lot of heartache for over 50 percent of the seniors in Alberta, who are living, as the Premier himself described some of them, on the edge.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

The results of some of these changes, Mr. Speaker, have led to a lot of confusion, anxiety, fear, hopelessness, and helplessness among seniors and their families. They've also led to a proliferation of so-called help lines in our communities. The government Department of Community Development, our health care authorities, the police departments, and a number of other services have provided help lines for seniors to try to alleviate some of this anxiety.

This motion that I'm presenting, Mr. Speaker, is a simple motion. It just says: listen; let's form a collaborative approach with the federal government, who are now in the throes of making some major changes to seniors' benefit programs. Let's form a collaborative approach and get into business with them and have some kind of information lines that will give seniors information about a multitude of programs and will keep them from the necessity of running around.

Now, part of my incentive in bringing it forward was my experience of a year or more ago when the Legion in Calgary found itself in a position of having to open a food bank. I think most of us in this House were really quite shaken by that information that there were veterans who had fought in one or more wars who were in need of food and who didn't have sufficient income to provide their needs. They were of course told: well, you should go to the federal government. The federal government said: well, you live in Alberta; go to the Alberta government. They got passed around, and many of them were frail and were really not in a position to run around the city of Calgary, let alone deal with all of the systems that we and other governments have put in place with the intention of helping seniors but which, in the final analysis, confuse them and make things more difficult for them.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that if we have something of this nature, we will have some economies of scale, that we will save money, that we will certainly create a simpler system and a more efficient system that will meet human needs and not meet system needs first. I think that with the very best of intentions, that's what we've done. We have a health care system, so we have a health care hot line. We have a seniors system, so we have a seniors hot line. We have a seniors abuse system, so we have a seniors abuse hot line. We have a proliferation of them, and I believe that much can be accomplished by combining them, certainly making it more economical and making it simpler.

What are the programs that seniors most currently want information about, that they seem confused about and can't seem to get accurate information on which they can act on? Well, certainly income support is a major one. The Alberta seniors' benefit at the outset, as the program was created, set up an information line. It was absolutely besieged. It was deluged, Mr. Speaker, with requests for help. I think each one of our constituency offices found itself in a position of having to support people to deal with that office who weren't able to answer their questions.

Income support is also a problem for the federal government, who get continuous calls about veterans' affairs, about aboriginals and otherwise. So it isn't restricted in any way, shape, or form to the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, health care is another one, and we find in the city of Edmonton, for instance, the Capital health authority and the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired trying to collaborate on setting up an information line about seniors' health care. Yes, it is a very important subject. Seniors are worried about Blue Cross care. The snowbirds are worried about whether they're covered when they're going to the States. Seniors are worried about extended health benefits: "If I'm discharged from hospital early, do I have to pay for home care? How do I manage if it isn't covered?" They're concerned about their drug costs going up: "What will I do if I can't afford them? Can I get a card from social services if I can't manage my drug costs?" They're worried about IV costs if they're sent home from hospital. They want to go home, but they can't afford the intravenous. They're worried about aids to daily living.

Mr. Speaker, there's a whole range of supports in health care that they need information about. They need to be able to call up and be given to somebody that can answer those questions and can help them to deal with their anxieties about themselves or their family members.

3:50

Another field of practice that seniors come to me about is certainly the current concern about elder abuse, and we heard in

the throne speech His Honour the Lieutenant Governor say that this government is going to set up a hot line on seniors' abuse. Another one, something that some of us find very hard to believe really occurs: a great deal of seniors' abuse, in fact the majority of seniors' abuse is related to financial abuse. It's going to take some very particular skills to deal with that. Why should we have a separate system set up in our province? Quite often, if seniors feel themselves abused financially, they may not be accessing all of the financial support systems that are available to them. What good to call that abuse line if they're simply going to be handed over to three or four other lines? Why not solve it with one-stop shopping?

We're seeing some wonderful new programs develop in the province, Mr. Speaker, regarding housing, particularly assisted living programs. They're coming all over Alberta, and I think they provide an excellent alternative. Seniors want to know: "How can I find out about that? What will it cost? How can my family find out where I can access this kind of activity?"

Last year the government put in place something called the special needs assistance program. I thought that was rather a cruel program, in a way, because it raised expectations in many seniors who believed sincerely that they had special needs but could not access funds, and I think the numbers proved that. Out of the 6,500 or 6,700 who applied, only some 450 or so were able to get funds, and I think that tells us the story. It doesn't tell us for one minute that seniors really didn't need the money; it simply tells us that the program was too difficult, that the forms were too difficult, that seniors don't always keep receipts, and so on.

"Where do I call?" Well, fortunately, many of them got to constituency offices, to their MLAs, and got help in filling out the forms and in many cases going to appeal. They were still turned down. It would have been better if there had been a real number with a real person that could walk them through what they needed to do and spare them the agony of filling it out and then being turned down simply because of a technicality.

Mr. Speaker, with changes to the FCSS program there's a lot of anxiety around Meals on Wheels, which is keeping many seniors in their homes. We're very thankful for that. We have a lot of calls and I'm sure other members do: "What am I going to do if I can't get Meals on Wheels or if I can't afford it any longer?" They need reassurance on those types of things.

There's another whole field of practice that is burgeoning right now, Mr. Speaker, around living wills and around trusteeship and guardianship. This is a very complex area for many families. We see family anxieties, we see family fights, we see family squabbles around how we should deal with mom or dad if they're becoming very frail and not able to make decisions for themselves. We need to have a simple way of dealing with the problems that arise in families around those issues.

Another one that should be mentioned - I'm sure every member here will have their own list; these are just some of the ideas that come quickly to me that need to be dealt with in an information line - is safety and crime. "I'm afraid to go out at night. I can't afford to have the fancy switches that keep the lights on. I don't know whether I should answer the door. I'm getting too many calls with nobody on the other end of the line. What should I do about it?"

Mr. Speaker, if we look at the federal programs, the OAS and GIS: lots of questions around that, lots of questions around the federal government's recent announcement that there are going to be changes made, that seniors will be grandmothers into those changes, that they won't happen until 2001. But what does that

mean? What does that mean to me if I'm coming up to being a senior and should be making some decisions about my estate and my own planning in regard to that?

Veterans' pensions are another issue, Mr. Speaker, that has troubled people in Alberta greatly over a number of years. We have a lot of calls in my office about it. People are cut off or aren't able to access veterans' pensions that they believe they have a right to. We find an increasing insistence in this government for people to claim their disability pension. If, say, at age 60 they are unable to find work and they can prove to somebody in Ottawa that they can't get work because they have some slight infirmity, then they're encouraged to access the disability pension or else even more difficulty endured by having to access their CPP, which inevitably reduces the total payout they will get.

Mr. Speaker, I've already mentioned problems that aboriginals have getting information that they need when they are seniors. I'm also concerned about immigration and family reunification programs, where new Canadians want to bring older family members to join with their families here in this country. We meet many difficulties around there.

Mr. Speaker, what will happen? Where are the examples of where it's already working? Well, I suggest to you that there is excellent federal/provincial collaboration that's working successfully in other fields of practice. In economic development we see announcements by our minister and the federal minister who say, you know, "We're setting up these centres around the province to give people instant, one-stop information about federal/provincial programs on economic development." Great idea, and it's working successfully.

In social services and career development: working successfully between the federal government and the provincial government. We've seen a merger of the Canada employment centres with Alberta career development working very well. This is the kind of example and illustration, I think, of programs where we can have a good working relationship with our federal cousins, my federal cousins.

Mr. Speaker, what will it accomplish? I've already said that I think we can save money. We can eliminate a lot of human anxiety and suffering. It will be a convenience to people. It will be a support to people and their families. It will certainly provide a tremendous amount of information about how well programs are working, both provincial programs and federal programs, and it will resolve a lot of the obvious overlap and duplication that we're seeing right now.

One would hope, Mr. Speaker, that we would see as a result of this better research coming to develop national standards. I think this is of concern. I know that our minister of social services, probably as we speak, is discussing this matter with other ministers. We've all talked about it. This is the kind of area where I think national standards need to be worked at and worked at early. We need the research in order to do it.

Mr. Speaker, one would also hope that municipal programs could be rolled into such an information service. Not all municipalities provide programs. Many of them do through their FCSS for seniors' centres, and some do provide programs on seniors' abuse already. Although that isn't contained in the motion, I think that should and could well be rolled in.

Mr. Speaker, we could, I believe, see a change in professional and institutional turf wars as a result of this, something that costs us money, costs us time, and costs people anxiety. I would hope this would reduce that. I would anticipate a shorter response time, a capacity to respond more quickly to new needs. I also

envision a highly technological system making use of current technology and technology as it develops so that isolated seniors across our province could have a greater sense of confidence and safety. No reason a service of this kind can't be computer and Internet linked across the province and eventually across the country.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I've just listed a few of the things that I think are important for us to consider in this motion. I think it works well in other fields of practice; I see no reason that it would not work well for seniors. I think it's the kind of example that Albertans can well get into, can start something that would be helpful to our citizens. We can start it going and see how well it works out; it has in other fields. I see this being a great asset in Alberta and to the federal government as well.

I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to hearing the Member for Calgary-Currie and having that amendment presented.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to just make a few comments before we table the motion. One of the strategies that occurred to me is that what we really need is a web site here, and maybe if we can get that process in place, seniors might find a lot more information at their disposal.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak in favour of this motion and the amendment that I'm about to table. The concept of a one-stop contact for seniors is a good one, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has given a good number of examples where it is particularly beneficial. I do note that it is consistent with other initiatives in other departments, and I'm pleased to see that those have been recognized not only as initiatives but as productive ones to better utilize tax dollars on behalf of all our citizens.

We have a growing number of seniors, over 265,000 in Alberta last year, and it's estimated that by 2021 the number of seniors will double in this province. Consequently, their very unique social, economic, and physical needs will require services to be tailored to meet those variety of needs. It's critical that seniors are made aware of programs and services available to them to ensure that they can live continually with good health and independence. Mr. Speaker, what is essential here is a strategic plan to communicate with seniors, one that meets the aging population who may or may not have access to technology, who rely on caregivers, and also to recognize that the cost of providing information can be prohibitive, and therefore we do need strategic thinking about what communications strategies we develop.

I'm very pleased as chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council to identify some of the initiatives that we've taken since 1991, when the council was established to advise, report, and make recommendations to government on legislation and policies that affect seniors and on the funding and co-ordination of programs and services relating to them. The council is this government's primary link to Alberta seniors. It consults regularly with the public to determine the concerns and needs of seniors and, as well, to identify back to the community the work of government and, in doing so, eliminate some of the confusion and misinformation that can often occur with change.

Health and wellness is an area of primary concern for Alberta seniors. As you know, in 1994 the advisory council was moved to the Department of Health for the express purpose of assisting and facilitating, exchanging some of that information with respect to changes in health.

We have been very successful as a council in providing

information to seniors, and we are very pleased with some of the feedback we've had. Mr. Speaker, we served over 7,000 seniors on the phone last year regarding information on both federal and provincial programs. In addition, we had a number of walk-in seniors who came to our storefront office on Jasper Avenue. In our consultations with seniors over the last year, over a hundred different organizations have had an opportunity to meet and discuss with the Seniors Advisory Council. The part of that that's of interest is that the membership of those organizations does reach into the several hundreds and thousands, and consequently through an exchange of information we feel that the council has been helpful in getting that information in the hands of seniors.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Community Development operates a toll-free seniors' information line which provides information on both federal and provincial programs and services. The calls that are received regarding federal programs are then referred to the appropriate federal agencies. Clearly we are working towards a very collaborative, one-stop model for seniors, and these 1-800 lines offer that one-stop help to seniors. In addition, there are a number of opportunities on the phone lines. I would just cite that the government information RITE line is also one of the processes that we utilize in order to access different departments, for some of those seniors' issues may be with respect to transportation or housing and may not be specifically in the area of Community Development. Every senior has an opportunity through the RITE line to access government on information and programs and services, and as you may or may not be aware, the regional health authorities have also established in some cases a similar toll-free line.

Mr. Speaker, the Seniors Advisory Council has been meeting with each of the regional health authorities to talk about some of the communication issues with respect to seniors as they identify changes to programs and services and health care restructuring, and I'm very pleased with the initiatives that are coming out of the regional health authorities in this area. Some of these issues are not necessarily health related but deal with transportation and access to facilities, which may or may not have changed. Just getting the right information in the hands of seniors can often alleviate some of the stress that they may be undergoing with respect to their health care needs. Also, information on federal programs is obtained through the Reference Canada 1-800 number. In addition, Revenue Canada has set up two urban numbers plus two 1-800 rural numbers to provide information on programs such as Canada pension plan and old age security.

Mr. Speaker, I suppose one of the most popular documents that the Seniors Advisory Council has been involved with is the publication of the Programs for Seniors booklet. It is very widely publicized and distributed, and it does give a one-stop snapshot of the current programs available to seniors. Not only is it very helpful to the seniors themselves but also to their caregivers, and because of the way it is produced, it eliminates some of the ambiguity as to what programs are available and how one can access them. This reference guide lists support services available to older Albertans, and it provides information, again, on both federal and provincial programming including old age security, the Canada pension plan, guaranteed income supplement, the Alberta seniors benefit, the special-needs appeal, and the Alberta health insurance plan.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, in talking to seniors, I find that when they have been distressed with some of the cutbacks to programs across government as we've gone to this significant deficit elimination

process, this document is very reassuring, because you will note in that document that the government of Alberta provides the most comprehensive and extensive range of programs to the seniors in this province in all of Canada. When you finally see it spelled out in front of you, it is indeed a very, very strong support of the seniors on behalf of this government.

Mr. Speaker, information is also provided for seniors who wish to continue their education, obtain bus passes, join seniors organizations such as the Alberta Senior Citizens Sport and Recreation Association, or even obtain legal aid, and it provides detailed information on who is available and eligible for programs, how to apply, and additional numbers that they may call for further information. It is very, very helpful, and it also speaks to the issue that not all of the programs and services that seniors may wish to access are the domain of the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, as we have continued to revisit programs and reshuffle some of the business plan process and asked municipalities and even to a certain extent our postsecondary institutions – and I cite the seniors chair at the Grant MacEwan College and the continuing education program for seniors available at U of C, just to name a few. Some of the services to seniors are available at the local level. Having a way to communicate that information so that not even all the calls have to come to government, that they are best dealt with at the local level, Mr. Speaker, that kind of initiative is, I understand, what is at the heart of the motion in front of us by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

In addition to the program book for seniors, the advisory council puts out a fact sheet on a bimonthly basis. Mr. Speaker, this might deal with an update on extended health benefits or a process of drug review that's going on, or we could be looking at community rehab.

Mr. Speaker, we do have many ways to get the information to seniors, but the initiative of co-ordinating that is certainly an important one. In addition to a format of print material, telecommunications, and even the Internet, some of the best communication occurs on a one-on-one basis, and I'm very pleased that in 1994-95 we co-hosted with the Alberta Association on Gerontology a conference that dealt with the communication of information, some of it to do with our regional health authorities. Our information workshop has been very well attended and is a good way to get the information in the hands of those who are giving support to our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, another initiative that the council has been involved with which speaks to the heart of the motion is the joint meeting we hold annually with the National Advisory Council on Aging. As you may know, each province is invited to have membership participation in that, and it reports directly to the federal government through the federal Department of Health. In addition to that meeting, other provincial councils sit at that table and look at collaborative opportunities to meet seniors' needs. A joint initiative that came out of our meeting last October in Vancouver deals with this very, very important issue of joint communication so that the best information is in the hands of seniors.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not recognize at this time the important role of services and delivery that the Department of Community Development has provided to seniors. As previously mentioned, the 1-800 information line is a very, very effective opportunity for seniors to access changes to government programs. They have worked very closely with the federal

government in providing older Albertans with information on any changes that have been happening across both levels of government.

Last fall in Red Deer a joint presentation was made at the seniors' information fair, and in Medicine Hat an information booth was also shared with the trade and information fair. Community Development's seniors policy and programs branch is central to the co-ordination of structures within government to address the issues of all seniors in Alberta. One of the roles of this branch is to provide information and promote public awareness of seniors' issues. It also acts as a liaison at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels on seniors' issues and participates in the development and co-ordination of intergovernmental strategies and policies. Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important that Community Development be recognized. As you may or may not know, the Alberta seniors' benefit process that we introduced over two years ago is a model for funding seniors' programs with fewer dollars and meeting the needs of seniors that has been adopted by our federal government, as was announced in their recent budget, and I think credit should be given to the Minister of Community Development for that initiative and its successful implementation.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, as we monitor the ongoing effect of changes to seniors, the minister has been responsible for extending points of access to nine other locations across this province on behalf of seniors: Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Cochrane, Red Deer, Stony Plain, St. Paul, Edmonton, and Grande Prairie. Through the Community Development department these access points are strategically placed so that seniors living in any corner of the province will have reasonable access to both federal and provincial service and program information. I'm certain that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will be pleased with that development and initiative.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce this amendment, and I have the requisite 90 copies for the House. While they're distributed, I'd like to read it into the record. Again, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who assisted us with drafting this amendment.

Mrs. Burgener moved that Motion Other than Government Motion 507 be amended by striking out "office" and substituting "process" and adding the following after "seniors": "incorporating the following but not limited to single point of entry, Alberta Community Development seniors' information line, the Eldernet system for seniors, and other such information services."

I think that in introducing this amendment, we are recognizing the fact that the work that has been done to date on recognizing the importance of co-ordinating information to seniors is paramount to this government. I mentioned earlier the work of the Minister of Community Development in acknowledging the need to monitor the ongoing needs of seniors. I think that this amendment, with support from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, identifies that this is a priority of government and that we would like to recognize the use of technology as an opportunity to continually update and integrate information on behalf of seniors.

I appreciate the support of everyone in the House as we move forward with the debate this afternoon.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly rise in support of this motion. I'll keep my comments brief because I

know a number of other colleagues wish to speak to the motion as it will be amended.

I guess three points deserve mention. The first is that anything that can lead to greater co-ordination between the federal and provincial governments in terms of the delivery of services in any area is to be pushed, but in particular for seniors, given the linkages between federal and provincial programs in this area and how if a federal program is changed, often a provincial program will take that into account by deleting funds. And vice versa, I might add.

One would hope that as a result of this type of co-ordination, you would see the types of computer programs that have emerged. For example, farmers knew to the dollar exactly what they would get under GRIP, but there are no such programs that we see available for seniors. Given that the characteristics of seniors in terms of income, status, and other sources of wealth are pretty well defined, it's very easy to get an idea of the flow of funds that should be available. Co-ordination will allow, then, this type of one-stop packaging just in terms of the ability of seniors to know what the flow of funds is going to be. If we can do it with some agricultural programs – this again was done by the private sector through specification of software – it should easily be done in this area. It's just one example where there's I think an immediate payoff to co-ordination.

Another issue is really the respective roles. What do we expect of the federal government in this type of co-ordination? Do they level the field between different provinces, and do they move in to try and provide a common standard across provinces? Do they provide the base and provinces top up? I think as we approach the issue of co-ordination between the federal and provincial governments, the issue of what is the role of the federal government – is it setting the base and allowing provinces to choose different margins, or is it to smooth the base once provinces have made the decision? – could be addressed and should be addressed.

The third point I would make is that while I think computer technology and the Internet are important, I do believe in the case of seniors in particular that they do wish to speak to other people both for the sense of reassurance that they get and for their ability to obtain information to very specific types of questions they would ask. While I see a significant role for the Internet and other types of electronic ways of delivering information, that electronic processes are interactive, I still think that in the case of seniors in particular the ability to talk to a human being is important. So I would urge, if we approve this motion – and I think all members will support it – that we don't lose sight of the issue: when we talk about one-stop shopping and one-stop co-ordination, you still need the ability of seniors to talk to individuals and get both reassurance and the information that they seek. Electronic delivery is important. It's complementary, but it's not a perfect substitute for the other type of information delivery.

With those comments, I'll take my seat.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to speak to the amendment and to support the amendment that is brought forward by my colleague. When I read the motion that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had brought forward, I was very supportive of the motion, but there was something in it that troubled me. It was the word "office." The reason I was troubled was because I thought of the vast expanse of Alberta and I thought of how the word "office" was intended in that motion. Was it intended that there would be an office in every community? Was it intended that there be one central office?

We've had some experience with an office in the city of Edmonton by providing a storefront office for the Seniors Advisory Council. It's interesting to see the use of that office. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, when he mentioned the human element, brought forward a very important point. For the seniors that can access that office here, it's been a valuable tool. I think, though, that what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud also identified is that there are a number of ways that we need to look at how we make seniors aware of the opportunities that are there for them in programs both at the provincial and federal levels.

I'm reminded of the process that we are going through in the appeal's process in Health, that we've asked the Provincial Health Council to do for us now. Their first report showed that there was no shortage of appeal mechanisms, but what there wasn't was a very user-friendly way to get to that system. I think that's what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is bringing forward here.

The hon. member that's the chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council has very succinctly outlined many of the programs that are available to seniors, but the question is: do seniors know about them? Yes, there are a lot of seniors groups out there, but do they touch every one of the 265,000 plus and growing seniors we have in the province? So I think that essentially we need to look at the process that we have in place and to blur the lines between federal and provincial governments, because really seniors are not that keen on knowing which is which. They're more keen on the day to day: "How do I access what programs? Can I use what is available?"

4:20

I hope that when we look at this process, we understand the demographics, the cultural differences that are in our society today. We have a Community Development toll-free line for seniors, which I think has been well used. I'm not sure that every senior in Alberta, if you asked them, knows it exists, and perhaps that's one of the areas we should look at. Have we actually asked seniors themselves what the best methodology of imparting information to them would be? Not just the seniors' committees that are out there, the various groups, but just sit down and talk to some seniors in drop-in centres, in various places and ask them. I think that if we asked them, we'd come up with the right process, which is what we in this House I believe on both sides want to do with this.

I think it's extremely important that seniors understand those options. Even though I support this and I think this is important, I will continue to support the regional health authorities in making available directly to seniors information for care options in the various regions. I think that can be complementary and certainly would be useful as a part of this initiative as well.

Mr. Speaker, I support the amendment. I hope that all members on both sides of the House will support the amendment. I certainly congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing the motion forward and for agreeing to the amendment brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Currie.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to speak in favour of the motion, and I will support the amendment, although I thought that the motion was better before the change was made because it does identify a place. I support the motion

for a number of reasons, but one that's very important is that it's consistent with our Liberal concern with the strengthening of community.

What's happened to communities in the last number of years across our provinces has been a great concern. It's difficult for Albertans to consider themselves a member of a family of 2 and three-quarter million Albertans. It's one thing to enjoy the rights and the obligations of being that larger body politic, but it's hard to think of being a member of a community in terms of being an Albertan. I think what we have seen in our school systems and in our policing systems, particularly in urban areas, is a need and a desire of people to move towards more intimate communities, smaller entities. As I said, we've seen the police departments in urban areas move to community policing. It's quite a change for urbanites now to know the local constables, to see the cars frequently in neighbourhoods, from the years when they were highly centralized departments and you only saw them as they raced down to some emergency.

I think the motion is important in that it helps to move us to that building of more intimate communities, and that's one of the reasons I liked the word "office." My constituency office is in a shopping mall, and the shopping mall is like main street in many small towns in this province. There's a subculture that's grown up around that mall, and the constituency office serves in part the kind of service that I think the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar envisions in the one-stop shops that would serve seniors.

To serve those seniors, transportation has to be considered. I know that the member across the way talked about the Internet. I was rather interested in her comments about the Internet, because I was at a health forum where a group of seniors pshawed the idea of getting their information off computers.

AN HON. MEMBER: Pshawed.

DR. MASSEY: I think that's the word. That was the expression they used: pshawed. They talked about the need for human contact. It has to be within reasonable distance. It has to be accessible to them. For instance, they won't travel to our constituency office if they can't do so in daylight hours. If they have to wait for someone to accompany them later, they will. So it has to be accessible. One-stop shopping I think has to be within the notion of a community.

More importantly than the location, although I think location is extremely important, it has to be staffed by knowledgeable people, those people who can help seniors get help. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar tried to outline some of the concerns they come with, but in main part seniors come for information. They want to know about health care. They want to know about the kind of assistance that's available to them. They come with problems. They come with problems that they want help with in terms of solutions. Our constituency office, again, has helped seniors as they try to have operations moved up, to be more effective, as they come in with consumer problems. They're asking advice about legislation, how changes in legislation might affect their lives. They come with transportation problems. They come with concerns about taxes, provincially and federally. So there's a whole host of concerns they arrive with.

Just as important as them being able to come there and articulate their concerns is that there's someone there that gets to know them. I think it's extremely important that someone knows who they are – and I don't see a large, centralized office being able to do that – someone that not just knows who they are but knows

their needs and, in the rare case, being able to have an individual in one of those offices that might take some proactive action and actually seek them out, not wait until they have a problem but be in contact with them on a regular basis trying to ascertain how they're doing and to see if they don't need some help. So I think a one-stop shop providing the kinds of services that are envisioned in this motion has some real potential in terms of building community, in terms of making our communities more secure places for seniors, and for that reason alone I think it is deserving of support.

The number of seniors I don't think is really an issue. We have an obligation to citizens no matter how few in number they are to offer services to them, to make sure they're looked after and they're secure. I guess I would, again, go back to the notion of this being a good way to help strengthen communities across the province. I'm glad to see that it's going to receive support from both sides of the House.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, Standing Order 8(2)(c) requires me to interrupt at this time for consideration of other items of business.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

4:30

Bill 18
Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 1996

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

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to move second reading of Bill 18, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 1996.

This Bill amends a number of energy-related statutes. The amendments reflect the government's efforts to streamline regulatory procedures. They also ensure that the responsibility for certain penalties resides with those whose conduct leads to the penalties that arise.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, this Bill clarifies the ability of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to divert gas to Alberta core consumers in the event of a supply emergency and repeals section 5(e) of the Gas Resources Preservation Act, the so-called pre-emption section. This section permitted a condition to be included in all permits for the removal of gas from Alberta that the exporter supply gas at a reasonable price to any Alberta consumer willing to take delivery which the board felt could be reasonably supplied. This section was put in place in 1949 to ensure Alberta communities could get access to gas when the export pipeline system was first being developed. At that time there were only a few large buyers and shippers of Alberta gas and no functioning gas market that Alberta customers could turn to. This pre-emptive right was needed to ensure Albertans access to their gas resources.

This is not true today. Our gas industry has expanded tremendously since 1949 and especially since the process of deregulation began in 1986. Today there are hundreds of shippers of Alberta gas in a liquid and competitive gas market. The pre-emptive right, a holdover from the early regulated years of the gas industry, is no longer required to give Albertans access to their natural gas. This pre-emptive right is also not in keeping with this government's support for competitive and deregulated gas markets and the free flow of gas across provincial and interna-

tional borders. This government believes that equal treatment of all buyers of Alberta gas is needed for the continued development of the industry. We cannot expect others to give equal treatment to Alberta gas if we don't offer them equal access in return, and this is why our government so strongly and successfully supported the energy provisions in the North American free trade agreement when the federal government indicated that they might wish to amend them.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, that markets, not regulations, offer Albertans the best approach to secure and affordable supplies of natural gas. While we support market reliance for longtime supply security, we realize that a quick response is needed for fast-breaking emergencies, such as the failure of critical gas supply facilities, which could threaten the lives or property of Alberta core consumers and where the market may not react quickly enough to provide the needed supplies.

Section 9 of the Act allows the board to divert gas in such an emergency, but as it stands, it requires cabinet approval for such a diversion, and this may not be practical in the event of a sudden failure of facilities. For this reason, the government approved an order in council authorizing the board to issue a diversion order if a supply emergency threatened Alberta core consumers, and we are now proposing amendments to the legislation to embed the board's ability to protect Alberta core consumers in the Act. The proposed amendments will allow the board to act swiftly without cabinet approval if the lives or property of Alberta core consumers are threatened, and they will permit the board to set the price for any diverted gas if the parties involved cannot come to an agreement.

Let me re-emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment does not represent an increased regulatory intrusion into natural gas markets. This government believes strongly that reliance on market forces is the best way to ensure supply security for Albertans. It believes in the deregulated market and in free international trade in gas, which has enabled this industry to expand so rapidly since 1986, creating jobs and revenues for Albertans. All we are doing here is ensuring emergency protection for Albertans should a supply crisis arise too rapidly for the market to deal with it immediately. Such diversion plans to meet emergencies are a common feature in gas-consuming jurisdictions throughout North America.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments to the Oil and Gas Conservation Act are more administrative in nature. They will provide for more efficient processing of drainage and equity disputes. Under the current procedures of the Act for common purchaser declarations the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board could allocate production among producers in a pool but only after the common purchaser declaration was issued and the parties were given time to negotiate the production. This resulted in two hearings: one at which the declaration was made and a second hearing to allocate production. This amendment to section 40 will allow allocation to also be addressed at the first meeting.

Questions regarding allocation of production also arise, Mr. Speaker, if the board issues common carrier or common processor declarations. In order to resolve such disputes, a party is required to apply under section 37 or 42 of the Act and also under section 23 for the distribution of production. Because declarations under sections 37 or 42 can be made retroactively and orders under section 23 of the Act cannot, there is confusion on how the allocation is to be applied. The amendments to sections 37 and 42 will make the provisions allowing allocations under common carrier, common purchaser, and common processor orders

parallel, and confusion will be eliminated. The system will be administratively simpler, and the rights of parties will not change.

The amendment to the Petroleum Marketing Act serves two purposes, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission may in the course of marketing crude oil become liable for penalties due to actions undertaken on the basis of information originating from third parties. For example, the commission ships crude oil on the interprovincial pipeline. Recent changes to the pipeline's tariff allow penalties to be levied on shippers if they overnominate for capacity beyond a specified tolerance. Shippers, including the commission, overnominate based on inaccurate information originating from battery operators. Other shippers have amended their contracts so that they are indemnified with regard to these penalties, but because the commission obtains the information on which it bases nominations under the Act rather than pursuant to contracts, the commission cannot flow through the responsibility for the penalties in the same way but must do so pursuant to the Act. The amendments to the Act will therefore permit regulations to be made that will allow the commission to flow through to the responsible parties these and any other like penalties that might arise in the future.

The second purpose of the amendments to the Petroleum Marketing Act, Mr. Speaker, is to clarify what the regulations may include in the way of reporting requirements under the Act. The current regulation-making provision contains little in the way of detail in this regard. The amendments will make the provisions substantially the same as the regulation-making provisions for reporting under other energy statutes. As examples, the Mines and Minerals Act and the Natural Gas Marketing Act come to mind.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly Alberta can take justifiable pride in the regulatory environment of the petroleum industry in this province. It has actually been used as a standard by a number of other jurisdictions.

If you look at the emergence of the regulatory regime in the province – there's a colleague I think at the University of Lethbridge who wrote an 1,100-page book on the history of the ERCB, something I have not read but is very good; thus far just a paperweight, but I will get into it at some point – I mean, the province has a lot to be proud of in terms of the regime that is in place: the shift from the ERCB and its rolling in with the PUB in setting up the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

What we're dealing with is a market where there is market failure. I mean, in some instances markets work very smoothly, and there is no role for government intervention. We have many buyers, many sellers. There is very complete information. Then the market works, and you get outcomes which are the best that society can hope for. Once you go into a market where there are perhaps only one or two buyers or sellers, in the case of a pipeline, and there are many potential users, then the relationship in the market is very uneven by access being unfairly distributed when there are that many potential users of the service. So there is a role – and that regulatory environment in the province has tried to deal with that – whether you're dealing with the common property issues of resource pools or access to pipelines.

When you look at what this Bill does, then, does it in a sense undercut what is a strong regulatory regime? In a general sense

the answer is no. As you go through some of the specific provisions – I mean, in principle I think one can support the Bill, though I think in committee stage there probably will be some amendments coming forward. Let me just touch on a few points that I think are relevant in assessing the principle of the Bill.

When you look at the amendments to the gas preservation Act, here what happens is the board is given the power to make decisions in the case of an emergency – and that's defined earlier – without the consent of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Again, on the one hand, one can see that, you know, you need a quick response. On the other hand, one has to worry about the movement away from accountability by removing the checks and balances of the parliamentary system. It's clear that many cabinet decisions are not actually held accountable in the Legislature, but it's still important to have a check and balance in place. I would hope that the hon. member would discuss what is the payoff, then, of removing this particular check and balance. What is the savings in time? What circumstances can he envisage that would really require this to occur?

4:40

Secondly, the board is given the ability to set prices in the case of an emergency where the purchaser and the supplier cannot agree. Now, at some point you do need a mechanism for setting a price, for arbitrating a price when there is disagreement, but again what we have is a board that is not directly accountable entering directly into the market. Now, since in this particular market a case can be made that there is market failure at times, I do believe that the board should have the role and should have that as a last resort. But in the absence of regulations that set out very clearly how those powers will be used, the circumstances, it's hard to give carte blanche without in a sense more detail being provided by the hon. member.

Third, again dealing with the gas preservation Act. We're seeing changes in the overall regulatory regime, and I would hope that when the member responds to the points that have been raised in second reading dealing with the principle, he can put this in the context of the overall regulatory powers that currently exist. I mean, on the margin they're relatively small changes. But how do they tip the balance between the players in the market and the regulatory authority and mechanisms of accountability? Those issues that I've just raised – the balance in the market, the role of the board, and mechanisms of accountability – I guess are ongoing concerns both with changes to the gas preservation Act, the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, and in particular the Petroleum Marketing Act.

I'll just jump briefly now to the amendments to the Oil and Gas Conservation Act. Now, here we see that the board's regulatory power really is enhanced vis-a-vis the common carrier. I heard the hon. member provide a justification, but again I'd like to know a little more detail: exactly the circumstances under which this power will be used. I'm very willing to accept the notion that we do need the board there, that there is an important role played by the board in this particular market, but I would like in a little more detail the member just to set out the checks and balances that will exist in this new regulatory regime. I mean, will we know we have regulatory overload when we hear squeals from the players in the market? Surely not. So I would just like to know the checks and balances. Also, are there any changes in regulations that are going to accompany these amendments, and if so, what's the mechanism for vetting these regulations? Will they be going through the industry? Will they end up in the Law and Regulations Committee? I don't think so, not in the case of the latter.

I guess the other area I'd like to touch on perhaps in more detail is with regards to the Petroleum Marketing Act. While I can accept the amendments as provided – and, again, I think there is a rationale – I do have serious concerns with the changes to the Petroleum Marketing Act, and here's why. I mean, the department is in the process of privatizing the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission. What these amendments do, though, is provide additional powers to this board, that is certainly unelected, that has been generated by a process that is not yet tender, where there's a fee structure in place which the industry views as being higher than is warranted, and at the same time they're going to have the ability to assess penalties and flow them through to the players. Again, we don't see any of the regulations that might accompany this, nor do we have a very good handle on the process of privatization.

Questions have been raised in the House about the process by which the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission will be privatized, and some have doubted in fact the economic efficiency of that privatization. At the time that we're debating this, we're now giving this soon-to-be-privatized entity additional powers. Now, the argument that the hon. member made, that this board itself will be subject to penalties when they've acted in good faith on the basis of information provided, is compelling, but at the same time one has to know what the checks and balances are, because this appears to give them an unfettered role in assessing these checks and penalties. Now, it's clear from the comments of the hon. member that he envisages that the wrongdoer will be penalized and the just will be left unscathed, but it would be nice to know that that is so and that set out more clearly is the process by which those penalties will be imposed.

In second reading I know the member, as he has done in the past with the EEMA Bills, does at the end of the day answer the questions that have been posed and does so in detailed fashion. So I'm looking forward to hearing what the responses are. I'm particularly interested in the nature of the regulations that will accompany this – are there going to be new regulations? – and the process by which those will be vetted. I think that, in particular, with the changes to the Petroleum Marketing Commission, that's going to be of important interest to the industry.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

MR. PHAM: Question.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, as a result of Calgary-Montrose's signals from across the way, I rise to speak on this important energy Bill. I only wish that when the mover of the Bill stood and read those notes pertaining to the Bill, he would have read a little more slowly. The reason I have that request is because I try to respond to the comments that are made by the mover, and he was reading far too quickly for me to jot down many of the points he was putting across.

MR. MAGNUS: You should listen quicker.

MR. SEKULIC: He suggests that I should listen quicker, Mr. Speaker. I think it's easier to adjust the rate at which one reads than it is the rate that one listens.

Mr. Speaker, nonetheless, during that reading of those briefing notes, I picked up two points that I would like to address. One

was that of equal access to buyers. I believe he made mention of equal access to buyers, and I wasn't sure, when he was referring to that, whether he meant the core consumers of product. Now, that's outlined in section 9(1): "In that section, 'core consumer' means a . . . consumer as defined in the regulations." Although I listened intently, I didn't pick up from the member's comments what the meaning was. Unfortunately, I'm at a disadvantage because I don't have the regulations, and I'm sure that I won't have a part in setting the regulations, so I would have appreciated it if the member would have been a little more informative in defining that. I would appreciate what the regulations say, if there is a draft or if there is something in existence pertaining to "core consumer" that would be of benefit to me before we go into committee.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

The other point that the member put across – I guess it's consistent in much of what's said from the government side – was total reliance, absolute reliance on the market. In a way it's an abdication of government responsibility because there's this reliance on the marketplace and not regulations as the best support for the industry. I'm not convinced of that, because if there is potential public impact in a broader sense, then I would like to see that there still be some legislative ability to act on behalf of Albertans' interests. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm not convinced. Although the market does play a significant role, I do believe that government also plays a significant role and can't just abdicate its responsibility to the marketplace, because it just doesn't always work out.

MR. DUNFORD: Now, there's a Liberal.

MR. SEKULIC: I hear an hon. member from across the way saying, "There's a Liberal." I'm glad he can identify me as such, Mr. Speaker, because in fact I am very much a Liberal.

You know, when we come into this Assembly, it's constituents, it's Albertans that elected us to act on their behalf and in their interests. Industry is a very capable machine which can lobby and I know lobbies the hon. members of the government in regards to their interests, and many times, as we've seen in the case of Bovar, they've negotiated in their interest at significant cost to the public purse. So I do believe that we are here as protectors of the public purse and that there is a place for us to speak on behalf of all our constituents.

So the market has a significant role, but I'd like an explanation as to: are we completely removing any ability for regulatory intervention? If that's the case, I just want it clearly stated.

4:50

There's one additional comment. As I was going through the Bill, it was on page 1, section 9(3):

If the Board is of the opinion that an emergency described in subsection (2) poses a threat to life or property of core consumers in Alberta, the Board may require the diversion of gas under subsection (2) without the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

My only question there – it flows from comments made on a previous piece of legislation – was on the definition of "emergency." What emergencies could come about where this board could act independently? I'd like a little better understanding. I'm sure the hon. member will be able to provide me with such.

The last comment that I do have is that there are numerous

citations to "the Board," yet it isn't clearly stipulated as to which board we're referring to. I believe it's the Energy and Utilities Board that's being referred to, yet there's no acknowledgment that that's in fact the board.

So with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll pass the floor to another speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

Bill 19
Agriculture Financial Services
Amendment Act, 1996

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move second reading of Bill 19, the Agriculture Financial Services Amendment Act, 1996.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the Bill is to allow the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation to administer the farm income disaster program that's being introduced to farmers, the farm income stability program, abbreviated to FISP. Numerous housekeeping items have also been addressed and are included in this Bill and will allow for better efficiency in servicing the Alberta Financial Services Corporation's business.

First of all, dealing with the disaster program, Mr. Speaker, the Bill allows for implementation of a farm income disaster program and for it to be administered by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. The Bill will allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations to establish FISP and to govern the working mechanisms of such a program. Section 10 of the Bill adds section 52.1 to the Act to establish a program allowing the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation to make payments for a farm income disaster. Section 53(b)(i) is being amended to allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to pass regulations to establish FISP and to govern the operation of the program. The Bill also adds clause (iv) to section 53(b) of the Act for the purpose of allowing the corporation to collect any overpayments that may be made under the compensation program relating to FISP or any other program.

The Alberta Safety Net Coalition Committee, the committee that was involved in structuring this program, has a membership of 11 producer organizations. These are 11 farm producer organizations, and they developed the income disaster program. The whole-farm design caps losses to some degree by offsetting the gains from one crop of a farm enterprise against the losses of the other, so it balances the various crops. The program does not cover negative margin situations – that's where expenses are greater than revenues – so the claim situation itself is capped. The size of the payout to applicants is capped at a hundred thousand dollars per individual or \$500,000 per corporation.

It is important to remember that a corporation is defined as the sum total of individual participants to a maximum of five individuals. This represents another cap in that each corporation is capped by the number of individuals in its makeup. If there are two individuals in the corporation, the cap to the corporation is two times a hundred thousand and the individual cap then becomes \$200,000. So the corporation has to have at least five members and a significant loss to achieve the maximum \$500,000 cap. If there are more than five individuals in the corporation, the cap still remains at \$500,000. We need to consider all the caps in this program together because they really are a package of designed

features to limit payments while at the same time provide effective support to the agricultural industry when it's in need.

There are several roles defined for the program: the first one, simplicity and low-cost administration, which is very critical and very important; complying with international trade agreements; paying producers when there's a demonstrated need; and linking the whole program to crop insurance. The applicant in the program pays an application fee and in the event of a claim is justified a 1 percent holdback for the maximum of \$450.

With this background, there are a number of reasons why premiums were not introduced in the standard format as a percentage of the coverage. Charging a premium adds significantly to the administration costs because the farmer would have to apply for the program every year and pay a premium based on the coverage. If it were to be truly like an insurance scheme, premiums would have to be collected, contracts issued, and interest collection procedures in place for outstanding accounts, which of course creates an expensive process. If farmers paid administration on an annual basis, they would want to know what their coverage was up front in order to decide whether or not to participate in the program. This is a voluntary program. They would want their coverage to reflect their most current farm practices and operations. Each year there could be changes made to many contracts to reflect current practices, and this would add significantly to the administration of the program.

This is the first whole-farm program that is being attempted in this country that does not operate with matching federal and provincial dollars, such as NISA, for example. NISA doesn't pay on need and doesn't do much unless you have a lot of money in the account. Establishing a premium for this type of program would be difficult, especially if we were to have any bearings on the individual's situation. Later on, as we gain experience with the program, a premium could be contemplated but with pros and cons still to be considered.

Charging a premium not only implies a contract with the farmer but also implies that we would provide coverage without as many caps and as many restrictions. Premiums could be set for any portion of liability, but generally if we had premiums, we would likely eliminate the caps to individuals and corporations. If a premium were paid on liability, then we would not be able to cap the premium, the maximum payout. If a premium were charged, we would not likely be able to limit the fund to a maximum payout of \$200 million, and we would need to reinsure the program against sufficient disasters that would drain whatever is built up in the fund. A fund would have to be set up, with any nonused amounts in the year rolled over into a fund for future losses. Also, the fact that we only compensate between zero and 70 percent of the reference margin means that farmers are already picking up the equivalent of a premium. It's important to recognize that the farmers are picking up the top 30 percent. The design of caps and no premium charges in a traditional insurance scheme need to be considered together and with other design features of the program to assess their full impact and rationale.

5:00

The second part of the legislation deals with appeal committees. Section 3 of the Bill will also give customers of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation a statutory right to appeal through the implementation of appeal committees by addition of a section 10.1 to the Agriculture Financial Services Act. It's important that appeal committee has proper power. So long as decisions of any appeal committee are made according to board policy, the decision of an appeal committee will be final and binding on all

parties. While it's important for an appeal committee to have continuity and knowledge of policy, it's also important for an appeal committee to have the independence to render its decision independently. The makeup of the appeal committee strives for this balance. Therefore, the Bill states that the majority of the board may be neither employees nor members of the board of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, according to section 10.1. At least one board member will be part of the appeal committee so that continuity of policy can be maintained.

The Bill amends section 17 of the Act to allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations governing the operation of the appeal committees. It is intended that an appeal committee will consist of members of local agricultural development committees located in the appellant's area.

The prospect of the statutory appeal committee ensures that the concept of natural justice will serve Alberta farmers dealing with the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation.

Section 11(a) of the Bill repeals section 53(a)(iv) of the Act. The subclause (iv) was a clause that allowed the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulation for the settlement of disputes arising out of the insurance claim for losses. With the advent of the appeals section clause it's no longer necessary.

The next item that we're dealing with is the lending cap, section 28 of the Agriculture Financial Services Act. The Bill, Mr. Speaker, also reflects the true intent of the lending cap. The lending and guarantee limit of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation will still remain.

Section 5 of the Bill allows the corporation to administer loans or guarantees in excess of \$1 million only if the actual funding of the direct liability does not involve more than \$1 million of the corporation's own funds. In this manner the corporation can be the lead lender to assist other lenders in offering a package, putting a package together for a farm business involving funds that are in excess of \$1 million. With this Bill a local opportunity bond project will now be able to exceed \$1 million where the corporation is the lender of investor funds. Previously the corporation could not enter into an agreement to lend more than \$1 million, even if all the funds came from other lenders or investors. The liability of the corporation still remains the same: not to exceed \$1 million.

The integrity of the lending cap of the Agriculture Financial Services Act will be maintained by this Bill, but the administrative capabilities of the corporation are being enhanced to allow more flexibility and better customer service.

Mr. Speaker, we have also eliminated the allowance for the Lieutenant Governor in Council's approval for loans or guarantees in excess of \$1 million liability. Previously, by section 28 of the Act the corporation could seek an order in council for a loan or guarantee to exceed \$1 million. Section 7 of the Bill has altered section 28 of the Act to prevent any loan guarantees to exceed the \$1 million cap. The elimination of the Lieutenant Governor in Council's approval is consistent with maintaining a cap in government lending agencies. This Bill amendment will limit maximum lending and guarantee amounts for AFSC. This facilitates a greater lending flexibility that can only serve to provide a more efficient service to Alberta farmers and farm businesses and encourage Alberta agriculture into secondary processing.

Another item that we're dealing with is the area of employee pensions. Some employees in the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation were not given the benefit of the public service and the public service management pension Acts. Section 8 of the

Agriculture Financial Services Act has provision for a pension plan for the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation employees. With this Bill there is a change.

I'll close for now, and we'll certainly be prepared to discuss the Bill.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly all members on both sides of the House agree that it is important to have a strong and economically responsive agricultural sector, and measures which promote a more diversified and market-driven agricultural sector are in everyone's best interests, particularly the residents of this province. When one then assesses the principles of this Bill in terms of that focus, you come up with some positives in this Bill, though with positives you also have on the other hand concerns that I think can be addressed or assessed in the committee stage.

I'd like to start off, then, by going through some of the specific sections of the Bill. Since it provides a number of amendments, it's very hard to talk about an overriding principle. One has to focus on each of the specific sections and discuss the pros and cons of that particular section. So I will do this in some detail, because I find it an interesting Bill.

I would like to congratulate the minister and the department, because he's right. GRIP was an unmitigated disaster. This is the first effort, then, by any province to move to a program that is farm based, as opposed to some of the really economically ludicrous elements that were tied in with GRIP. So it does mark a very good first step, and certainly the province is innovative in this regard compared to other jurisdictions in Canada.

But with innovation sometimes comes risk, Mr. Speaker, and what I'd like to do is talk about the positives and the potential concerns that we have with the Bill. Let me start off, then, just by talking on section 3 very briefly. Section 3 of the Bill sets out the appeals committee, and it has a peculiar provision, which is that the appeals committee is chosen by the board and may include board members as long as the nonboard members make up a majority of the appeals committee. I still think it would be better to have a majority of the members, all of the members in fact, not being board members simply to separate the functions. I would be very interested in the minister's justification for why one would want board members as being part of the appeals committee, because I think it does pose that potential risk of being both the judge finding the problem and then assessing whether or not appeal is justified.

Now, I know that perhaps the board members that would serve on the committee are not those board members that might have been involved in the initial decision, but I think it's important to provide a justification for why one would have board members on that appeals committee. I'm sure that the regulations would preclude people from having served both functions, but on behalf of my colleague I would be most interested in knowing the justification.

Since this is, short of a judicial review, the only appeals process available, it's important, then, that the rationale for the structure be set out more clearly. A number of us on this side of the House would feel more comfortable if the appeals process were independent from the AFSC board of directors. But we're certainly willing to listen to the justification as to why he would want the blend.

Section 4 is simply housekeeping in terms of the fiscal year.

Section 5. Here again in terms of one of the themes that we've raised in this House, in terms of accountability and the role of the

Legislature, the minister can appreciate that it adds to the list of regulations that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may now make. That includes the appeal committees' procedures, the appeal committees' powers, and the matters which the appeal committees may hear. I think there would be a greater feeling of comfort on this side in terms of the principle implicit here if the Bill set out in more detail what, in fact, the matters are which the committee would hear. For the Legislature to devolve that to the Lieutenant Governor requires a significant act of faith that the minister, if he were sitting on this side of the House, would understand. So having it set out in legislation provides a more transparent framework as to the issues that would in fact constitute appealable.

If the minister can provide justification, then, of why the shift, which we see in a number of Bills that come forward in this House, a shift to government through regulation as opposed to legislation. So were it possible to bring in amendments that would set out in greater clarity the legislation, we certainly would look upon that with great interest and support.

5:10

Section 7 the minister has spent some time discussing, and that dealt with the issue of loans and guarantees. Again it appears that this Bill is being made consistent with the legislation that the hon. Premier introduced today. An issue of concern here is that as on one hand we move to limit the ability of the government to issue more loans and guarantees, this Bill sort of sets out in greater clarity the circumstances under which it will, under which in fact the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation has the ability to do that.

Again the minister can appreciate that as we look across the array, the province is heavily involved through ATB, through AOC, and through AFSC in the business of providing financial services at a time when many would argue on both sides of the House that there's a legitimate role for existing commercial operations there. So getting into the business of loan guarantees or loans again obviously, on both sides of the House, is a contentious issue. In the context, then, of committee stage we may bring forward amendments that deal with that, and the minister will appreciate that our focus will be contingent on the limitations Act, which we see coming forward tomorrow.

With regards to section 8, well, let me just say, again referring to the general principle, that on this side of the House we would always feel more comfortable if there were a more transparent way of assessing loans and guarantees provided through Crown corporations. Given the fact that it is the law in the province to have a balanced budget, which we agree with, given the fact that we hold the books on a consolidated basis so that if Crown entities such as AOC, ATB, and AFSC run at losses, it directly affects the consolidated deficit or surplus of the province, which means that if there are truly unforeseen circumstances that really impinge negatively on the bottom line of those three Crown entities, core programs have to be cut.

We would really like a more transparent and accountable mechanism, because we are in a straitjacket. At some point program expenditures could be driven by financial commitments that have been made by these three Crown entities. So again in committee stage we may come forward, depending on what the minister has to say about this particular Bill and contingent on what we see tomorrow with the other Bill with regards to some of the provisions in the Act.

I guess the most important issue – and regrettably the hon. minister didn't have an opportunity to speak to it in detail – is section 10 and FISP. I mean, this is a significant improvement

upon GRIP. GRIP was an idiotic program, and it was a costly idiotic program, so we're now moving to a more sensible program. The minister pointed out that it's farm based, so we're not going to see these distortions that would influence crop mix and crop choice. We will see, then, the farmer responding to market signals as opposed to program-generated signals. So that represents a significant move forward.

On the other hand, though, Mr. Speaker – and the minister has spent a significant amount of time discussing this point – this is not an insurance program. The minister spoke on why it was not, in his perspective, designed to be an insurance program and focused on the introduction of the caps and other mechanisms as ways of trying to limit the potential exposure to the province. Well, in terms of the principle – and that's what I'm speaking to – again, one of the virtues of an insurance program is that an insurance program, because it does involve premiums, generates incentives for prudence on the part of the person purchasing the insurance program. The minister made mention that sometimes the costs of imposing the premium outweigh some of the potential benefits of collecting. That was the nature of the argument made, that when he looked at the design of the program, the costs of actually imposing the premium outweighed the costs.

On the other hand, one could argue that some of the benefits that aren't calculated into the equation include a much better set of incentives to do the right thing. So I would think that the issue of whether or not this is actuarially sound is important. It's clear that it's not an insurance program; otherwise, there would be a premium. The element of a true insurance program, one that's market-driven, is that it's actuarially sound and actuarially fair. So this doesn't fall under that rubric.

Now, the hon. minister referred to this as a disaster program. Again, I would have to quibble on that point, because a true disaster program compensates you when you have negative margins. If in fact there is an act of God – a hailstorm, a flood, a snowstorm, forest fires, what have you, drought in particular – you are compensated for the losses you've incurred including the negative margins. So this doesn't really deal with the type of catastrophe that we see out there. With a true catastrophe the programs that come into play do compensate you, then, for negative margins, and this program, for the reasons that the minister suggested, doesn't, because there has to be a mechanism set in place to limit exposure and keep it under the \$200 million. So there's always a trade-off as one attempts to design these programs. I think it's a bit extreme to call it a disaster program since it really doesn't compensate you to that extent.

Now, the minister didn't get the opportunity to talk about alternatives to this program. The alternatives to this program include – and again my colleague from Lethbridge-East has argued, I think, that other alternatives could have been to redesign crop insurance, because to the extent that you could be truly concerned about a disaster, the crop insurance program is the ideal mechanism. Similarly, if you wanted to deal with the problems in the livestock industry, setting up a program that provided for better hedging makes sense as well.

So there are more market-based mechanisms that are actuarially sound that one could move to as opposed to this program. Again, broadening crop insurance and moving to a better hedging program for livestock producers might have been an alternative to FISP which might have in fact been far less costly and easier to assess. To the extent that they were actuarially sound, then, the whole issue of exposure and the \$200 million cap would have been less of an issue to deal with.

So what we have here is an alternative to those. Again, I know that the hon. minister when he addresses comments in committee

stage will try and explain to us why FISP and why not crop insurance and why not more mechanisms for hedging.

So with regards to section 10 those are some of the pros and cons. Again, it does represent a significant positive step forward. On the other hand, one can look at alternate mechanisms that perhaps would be less costly and less cumbersome.

Again, the minister spoke of this as being a disaster program, but since it doesn't cover negative margins, I would hope that the minister could tell us how this fits in, then, when there are floods or droughts and how this program dovetails with a true disaster, as we had just recently in southern Alberta with the floods.

Now, another concern – and I think this has been raised with the minister – is this whole issue of whether or not FISP has a bias against independent operators. Again, the maximum annual payout to an individual is \$100,000, but for a corporation or partnership, as the minister mentioned, it's \$500,000. On one hand that does seem to have a bias against the small independent operator as opposed to the corporate farm.

5:20

Now, the minister said that there's a cap up to five, so that's why the \$500,000 limit, but again there is a distinct difference between how the independent operator is being treated as opposed to the corporate entity, and if the minister could explain that and justify that in more detail, I think it would go a long way to addressing some of the concerns of my colleague from Lethbridge-East. Again, as the minister said, this program on one hand is neutral with respect to crop mix because it's farm based, but on the other hand the program does seem to be biased to a particular type of ownership structure. One would hope a true neutral program wouldn't have that particular bias.

Other issues that I could raise with regards to FISP deal in part with the regulatory environment that will accompany this. If the minister could go part of the way to assuring us that we might see the types of regulations that would accompany this program – because there's a significant role for discretion too.

I would like to say that this program does represent a significant improvement over GRIP. It has some positive features in that it's farm based and doesn't distort market signals as generated to the producer. On the other hand, one can see other mechanisms out there, particularly crop insurance and hedging, that provide similar venues or mechanisms of protection and don't have the problems of trying to build in mechanisms of capping that the minister has run into with this program.

The final issue is the issue of – I guess any program that doesn't have a premium makes me uneasy. Again the Premier makes – I just promoted the minister. The minister makes the argument that it's costly to collect the premiums and that it really influences the way you design the programs, but I can look out there and I can see crop insurance and other hedging mechanisms where in fact there are premiums that are actuarially sound and they seem to work. I think the minister was absolutely right: the province is making an important first step here, and this is a significant improvement over the programs that have previously existed.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]