

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 29, 1997**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 97/04/29

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. The prayer today is one that is said in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, and perhaps as we pray we might also recognize what is happening in that province.

Let us pray.

O Eternal and almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province.

Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all of our people.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition presented on Monday, April 28 regarding a public inquiry into the operation of the Workers' Compensation Board now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta hereby petition The Legislative Assembly of Alberta in Legislature Assembled to urge the Government of Alberta to hold a Public Inquiry into the operation of the Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition I filed on Monday, April 28 and last week's petition be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government of Alberta to introduce legislation that would prevent the use of replacement workers during strike action.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I am giving notice that tomorrow I'll move that written questions and motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 5 Persons With Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 5, being the Persons With Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act.

This Bill will allow for the establishment of a provincial board to assume responsibility for the management of services currently provided through the services to persons with disabilities program. It will also allow for the creation of community and facility boards to manage the delivery of services at the community level.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Leave granted; Bill 5 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 5 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 7 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1997

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 7, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1997. This Bill being a money Bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this Bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Leave granted; Bill 7 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Bill 8 Historical Resources Amendment Act, 1997

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 8, being the Historical Resources Amendment Act, 1997.

The purpose of the Bill is to enable such nonprofit entities as friends societies associated with our historic sites and museums to collect admission fees through the medium of contractual agreement with the minister while still retaining the historic resources fund.

[Leave granted; Bill 8 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 8 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 9 Election Amendment Act, 1997

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Election Amendment Act, 1997.

The Bill addresses the prohibition on broadcast advertising the day preceding and the day of the election.

[Leave granted; Bill 9 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table with the Assembly today four copies of the three-year plan of Alberta Transportation and Utilities primary highway construction and rehabilitation program '97-98 to '99-2000. Also included is the '97-98 secondary highway construction and rehabilitation program. Should members be interested in obtaining a copy, they'll be made available through our office.

In tabling these construction programs at this time, we'll provide industry with the opportunity of maximizing its work schedule for the coming year. There may be some modifications to the program depending on highway conditions as they exist throughout the province in a given year.

I know that these project lists are also of great importance to the MLAs and their constituents. Each MLA will be getting a copy of the project list as it applies to their constituency and/or city.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, April 17 I believe, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry tabled a letter in this Assembly concerning what he believed to be a release of personal claimant information by the Workers' Compensation Board. On receipt of the materials in question from the hon. member I forwarded them to the chair of the board of directors of the WCB, asking the chair to undertake an investigation. The chair has received the results of that investigation and forwarded those results to me this morning.

The results indicate that perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, to use the word that he tabled in the House in his letter, the word "appear" – it appears that he has been led astray by someone whose motives appear less than honourable. So I table four copies, Mr. Speaker, of the result of the investigation.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling today a response, which I said I would table, to some questions from the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona which actually more properly should have gone to Transportation and Utilities. But I did give the undertaking that I would table a response to that, so I will.

I'm also tabling today a graph, Mr. Speaker, which shows that federal health, education, and social transfers from 1995 through to the year 2000 were projected to be some \$530 million less, and in fact with yesterday's announcement they will be \$410 million less. I table that along with a statement at the time in 1995 which indicated that the government of Alberta would shield Albertans from those reductions.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: Opposition House Leader.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I've previously asked permission to circulate some Oilers decals as well as the new stylized shoulder flash which commemorates two of the most important things to Edmonton: its oil heritage and its hockey team. These have been previously circulated to all members, and of course today being a very important day for our team, I would hope all members would take the opportunity to wear these decals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Exhibits

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, if the hon. member chose to make a statement, that's one thing, but insignia and exhibits are not necessary to be tabled in the House at this time, certainly not under Tabling Returns and Reports. The Speaker did receive a request from the hon. member earlier in the day to circulate a memento to all members of the Assembly. That was given, and that was more than enough.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports
(continued)

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 27(1) of the Ombudsman Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly the 30th annual report of the Alberta Ombudsman. This report covers the activities of the office of the Ombudsman for the calendar year 1996. A copy of the report is being distributed to all members.

The Chair would also like to table a memorandum from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview requesting that Bill 201 come up for consideration today, April 29. In keeping with Speaker Schumacher's ruling of February 11, 1997, if there's time today, Bill 201 will be considered in Committee of the Whole if debate is concluded on second reading stage of Bill 203. If not, it will come up tomorrow.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very talented group of grade 8 and 9 students from George P. Vanier junior high school, which is in the constituency of Calgary-North Hill. This group has been out and about the province in Banff, in Millet in the last five days. They've been gone quite some time. They're accompanied today by conductor Trudy Fossey and 10 other very brave adult chaperons. This group of students has been performing on the grounds of the Legislature today, and they did a marvelous job. I'd like to welcome them to the Assembly. They're in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 52 grade 6 students from John Wilson elementary school in Innisfail. They're accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Pat Layden, Mrs. Judy Bourne, Miss Christine Scott, and also their helpers/parents Mr. Randy Walton, Mrs. Enola Nygren, and Mrs. Vera Friesen. They're in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce a constituent, Susan Platt, who's in the gallery opposite. Susan works for the Calgary public library, is active in the Library Association of Alberta, and is here for the big freedom of information conference going on this week. I'd invite Susan to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Federal Ban on MMT Gasoline Additive

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to inform the Legislative Assembly today that the government of Alberta has followed through on its commitment to challenge federal legislation banning the gasoline additive MMT. The challenge is going forward under the Canadian agreement on internal trade.

Federal Bill C-29, the Manganese-based Fuel Additives Act, recently received royal assent in the Parliament of Canada. This legislation will effectively prohibit the interprovincial trade in and the importation of the gasoline additive MMT, a substance which will, however, remain legal to use in spite of the trade ban.

The legislation is based on hollow arguments, Mr. Speaker. No evidence exists to demonstrate that MMT is an environmental or health hazard, nor has the automotive industry been able to demonstrate that MMT interferes with emission control systems.

From the outset the government of Alberta has expressed its opposition to this legislation. The Premier, the Minister of Environmental Protection, and the former Minister of Energy have all written to their counterparts in the federal government outlining our concerns. The legislation should have involved joint federal/provincial decision-making and co-operation, meaningful consultation with stakeholders, and a clear understanding of what benefits might result from the Bill before its costs were imposed on Canadians.

The action of the federal government is at odds with its avowed support for the agreement on internal trade and is inconsistent with the agreement itself. The government of Alberta is therefore pursuing this matter under the agreement. The designated official in the government of Alberta has written to his counterpart in the federal government to request formal consultations, which is the first stage of the dispute resolution process called for under the agreement. We trust that the federal government will follow the procedures set out in the agreement on internal trade and work cooperatively to deal with this formal complaint in an effective and efficient manner.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals support the federal government ban on MMT. In fact, MMT is an oxygenate. It started to be added to gasoline when lead was banned, and until recently MMT was also banned in the States for very good reasons. There are health concerns which are currently under review. It's thought to affect the nervous system – yes, it is – cause Parkinson-like tremors, and there's also concern for the effect on emission control systems. Automotive manufacturers claim that the magnesium in this gums up the engine parts, which causes cars to run unevenly and then leads to increased air pollution.

We would advise this government to err on the side of caution, as we have seen how many times they haven't and gotten into serious trouble. Bovar, Millar Western: you guys can line them up. We tend to be responsible on this side and think that until the serious health concerns have been addressed and the air pollution concerns have been addressed – and I see the minister of environment laughing at this. Air pollution is a serious consideration. It needs to be investigated, and there should be a ban on this substance until then.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, banning this substance in this

province is going to bring a benefit to Alberta business, which I would think this whole front bench would support. The additives that will be used instead of MMT are manufactured right here in this province. It will considerably support a number of industries which are growing in this business, which need to be supported, which I'm surprised the minister of economic development doesn't care about. Well, we stand by this ban, and we think that there should be further investigation into this substance.

**Speaker's Ruling
Decorum**

THE SPEAKER: Before the Clerk calls Oral Question Period, the Chair would just like to note that considerable courtesy was afforded to the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs when he presented the ministerial statement. That same degree of courtesy seemed to be met with a fair amount of interjections when the Standing Orders do allow for a response from the opposition as well. There's an old saying: what goes for the goose goes for the gander. I hope that in this case it would go for neither and that we would all agree with a considerable degree of courtesy in the House and recognize that there is opportunity in the House for debate on this substantive issue.

head: **Oral Question Period
Social Housing Corporation**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, yesterday a spokesperson for the Municipal Affairs department said that the \$2.5 billion in real estate losses referred to by the former minister includes both \$1.7 billion for real estate losses and \$800 million for operating losses. When we go back to add up all of the operating losses recorded in public accounts since 1982, the total losses are not \$2.5 billion; in fact, they're over \$3 billion. To the Premier: could the Premier please explain this \$500 million discrepancy in his accounting and tell us when exactly he's going to get the Treasurer to get the figures right?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: You know, yesterday it was an overestimation; today it's an underestimation. Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that this is audited as a matter of course by the Auditor General on an annual basis to my knowledge. Since I've been in this Legislative Assembly, since 1989, he has not made any mention of this or any other problem relative to the accounting, but if there is, I'll have the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs augment my response today.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm so glad for the question because it gives me an opportunity to reflect on the fact that during the boom time in the Alberta economy there was a need for low-cost housing both on the rental side of the market and on housing needs for people, families who wanted to buy. Five percent out of 100 percent paid 5 percent down to get a house.

What they are ignoring in that figure of \$2.5 billion challenged yesterday was that there was a portion of those costs that related to operations, maintenance, insurance, and interest rates, so that in effect when Social Housing did in fact do a write-down as a corporation, we had \$188 million against land assets, \$614.8 million of write-downs against mortgage and foreclosed properties, and the balance was in the operation's interest, et cetera, as I've stated.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, what the minister is doing is

now lumping in operating costs, and if she looks at her own public accounts since 1982, could she do that and please explain, then, why it is that her figure is \$2.5 billion when the public accounts figure is \$3 billion? Have we just lost another \$500 million? Seems to happen all the time.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, if it pleases the House, I will be very glad to provide detailed statements. However, I think it should be noted that since 1982 these statements have been annually filed and annually audited by the Auditor General. I can't say any more about it at this time, but it's all there in the public accounts, as the Premier stated.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier did not commit to providing the details of the losses, so I'm going to ask again. Will the Premier provide this Legislature with a detailed list of which properties were sold, how much was lost on each of the properties, and who bought each of the properties?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd be glad to take those under notice. Certainly those are questions that are normally asked in Public Accounts, and the Auditor General is usually present there.

Over the course of the past 20 years did this government invest in social housing and other properties? The answer to that is yes. Since the mid-1980s has the government been selling off these properties? The answer is yes. Were many of these properties sold at a loss? The answer is yes, because many of those properties were purchased at an absolute premium. Have all of those losses been duly reported every year in public accounts? The answer is yes. Have the financial activities of this government and its Crown agencies been examined by the Auditor General? The answer is yes. You can find it on page 203 of the 1995-1996 Auditor General's report. Now, Mr. Speaker, as a result of a question from the New Democrats the Liberal Party of Alberta has just become aware of all this, all this public information. I guess they'll reveal tomorrow that they have a source that says: the sun will come up in the east.

MR. MITCHELL: You know, we were pointing it out in 1989, when I and others predicted that there would be over a \$2 billion loss, but I love to see the state of co-operation between the Conservative leader and the New Democrat leader. Quite a turn of events, Mr. Speaker.

Child Poverty

MR. MITCHELL: A recent report from the Canadian Council on Social Development points out that child poverty means a life for these children of poorer health, lower levels of educational attainment, and behavioral problems. My question is to the Premier. What does it take for the Premier to acknowledge that Alberta with its unprecedented wealth still has the third-highest level of child poverty in the entire country?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if that statement is true or not, but I doubt it very, very much. The person who really is on top of this issue and has been just doing a tremendous job relative to children's services in this province is the hon. minister responsible for children's services, and I'll ask her to respond.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the largest difficulty with measuring poverty is something that we've been trying to deal with all across this nation. I believe what

we've been doing in the children's initiative is one way to be able to look after that issue, taking it back to the community, where the community looks at the needs based on social to economic needs. I think that as we move towards that kind of responsibility, people will be able to identify what poverty is.

Poverty is very hard to measure, Mr. Speaker, and all across this province we have different ways of measuring poverty. The income level that they've been looking at has been so totally different. So what we have to do is look at alternative ways to be able to measure poverty. One such measure may be using the Christopher Sarlo on the Fraser Institute's basic needs index. That may be a way for us to be able to look at how poverty can be measured.

MR. MITCHELL: The obvious question is, Mr. Speaker: why doesn't the Premier know that Alberta has the third-highest level of child poverty in the entire country when it's as easy as checking into the Statistics Canada analysis, which is available updated on an annual basis?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition heard the hon. minister's reply, and obviously her reply is that the issue of poverty and the measurement of poverty is very, very subjective. But if he didn't get the answer the first time, I'll ask her to give the answer the second time.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you. Actually, Mr. Speaker, if I can, I'd like to quote from the National Council of Welfare poverty profile, 1995. This following quote, I think, is really significant. It says that Statistics Canada takes pains to avoid references to poverty. It says that the cut-offs have no official status and it does not promote their use as a poverty line.

Again I would say that when we're dealing with poverty, we must look at how we measure it, and in that sense we must be able to deal with specific poverty issues. In Alberta we are doing a number of things which I think are so important and taking it back to the community, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: Does the Premier understand that among many other things there is a direct link, for example, between levels of child poverty and rates of teen pregnancy and that Alberta has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the entire country?

MR. KLEIN: Well, you know, these are interesting statistics, and I guess statistics can be prepared by any agency or any individual at any particular time, Mr. Speaker. These things tend to be subjective, and again I will defer to the hon. minister to augment my reply.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you. First of all, when we're talking about a report, we must realize that reports are very subjective depending on where they get their research, Mr. Speaker. It's true: child poverty is nothing that we should be laughing at. Child poverty can be a serious situation if we measure according to what the needs are in each area.

In Alberta we've been very, very lucky. We're talking about some of the things that we've been doing in Alberta, and I'll just give you an example, Mr. Speaker. One of the conditions that the report states for a solution to poverty says: to build an inclusive, equitable society that values and supports its families and children. We are working with Albertans to do just this through the Growth Summit and, I would say, through the redesign of services for

children and families. As a matter of fact, we are also trying to ensure that we are going to work together and integrate services. We've got five departments who are working together to make sure we have a one-window approach to deal with the issue of families and children and to ensure that the services that they're going to get are something that's going to be positive.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: It may be a novel idea in question period, but if an hon. member chooses to raise a question, one would think that all hon. members would want to hear the answer.

Third main opposition question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Child Welfare

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Other ministries in Canada responsible for the care of children report the number of children who have died while in government custody. In '95-96 Ontario reported 37, British Columbia 49, and Manitoba currently is conducting a review of the recent death of two infants while in their care. Alberta interestingly chooses not to report the number of deaths but rather to record the number of children who are free from abuse and neglect rather than the comparable statistics to other provinces on the rates of death in child welfare. My question is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Can the minister tell the Assembly how many children in the direct care of government have died since the release of the Children's Advocate report/child welfare review *In Need of Protection*?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to point out one thing. We feel that the incidents of children that are receiving abuse while under our care is a very important statistic. We feel that once they are dead, obviously it is too late, and we try and be proactive in this and identify it earlier.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have those numbers at my fingertips. I would put to you that any child that dies while under our care is too many.

MRS. SLOAN: Why is this not a standard benchmark that is used by this government, as other governments use it, in their annual business plan?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We feel that the most important benchmark that we can look at is the actual incidence of abuse. I will get back to the hon. member, but obviously death is abuse as well.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By my own calculations your statistics released this year report that 260 children are injured or neglected while in the government's care. What measures at the very least is your department putting in place to reduce the number of children at risk for injury and death?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, when we put out that number, we felt it was very important to identify it and benchmark it. In an ideal world there would be zero children that would be undergoing abuse in our protection, and that's what we are aiming for. We feel it is extremely important and are identifying them so that we can better it towards the number of zero.

MRS. SLOAN: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Duly noted, hon. member.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, in the last four years this Conservative government has spent \$23 million in what they're calling a consultation process revolving around their plan to privatize child welfare services. That's more money than is being allocated in this year's budget for services for handicapped children. I'd like to ask the Minister of Family and Social Services: how can he justify spending more on consulting, more on planning and privatizing than he's prepared to spend on children with handicaps?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we are not privatizing the services to children. What we are doing is putting the decision-making down closer to the community in a very important initiative in providing better community services to the children of this province. We had an extensive consultation process that determined that the local people know better how to handle the services with children. We are there as a department to aid and abet them, but it is very important that that decision-making go down to the local level.

I'd be more than happy to have the minister responsible for children's services augment my answer.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's my day.

Actually, that's a very, very good question when we're dealing with handicapped children's services. First of all, I want to make, I think, a point in terms of what we mean by privatization. Usually that means government is divesting itself of a public service and turning it over to profit-making enterprises. Well, Alberta's redesign for children's services differs from that form because the term privatization means so many other things. What we are doing is that the province will still be responsible for everything that occurs under the Child Welfare Act. Handicapped children's services is still under the Child Welfare Act, which means that we are ultimately responsible for that. It also means, Mr. Speaker, the government will be ultimately responsible for any funding sources.

In terms of the handicapped children's services . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. minister. I'm sure you'll get another chance one of these days.

MS BARRETT: Whew, I thought we were going to hear about football fields next.

Mr. Speaker, considering that a number of parents in Alberta are very concerned . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

MS BARRETT: That is part of the question. Considering that a number of parents in Alberta are very concerned that deinstitutionalization is going to be part of this privatization package, will the Minister of Family and Social Services assure parents that if they want their children to remain in institutions, they have that choice?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, one of the big issues is whether or not these children will remain in the institutions. We feel that it is extremely important, and as you notice, the Michener Centre Board, for example, is coming forward in legislation that was introduced today.

One comment I would like to make is that in services for children, the consultation process, a large portion of the \$23 million actually was spent on early intervention programs to try and find and address these issues early. So it was not \$23 million that was spent in consultative processes.

We have no intention of taking children that need to be there out of facilities. I think that the hon. member is asking: should anyone who wants their child in a facility have the right to put them in? I don't think so. There are a lot of very stringent requirements to get in, but children will not be turned out from these facilities.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the answer.

Will the minister now tell us why it is that his department has developed a partnership with one organization, the Alberta Association for Community Living, in which they cosponsor meetings with the commissioner for children and even give information on clients for the projected services to be delivered?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the issue is something that I will look into. It is not customary for our department to give out individual information, and indeed I find that very hard to believe. We are not obliged to give out individual client information. Perhaps I would ask the hon. minister to augment my answer.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the handicapped children's services is a big issue in terms of funding, and anytime that we're dealing with families who have handicapped children, it's always an issue. The biggest issues that I see in terms of funding are two. One, the block funding that they're talking about: AACL has brought forward a proposal for us to look at. AACL has also indicated that they would want to be involved in the consultation process. There is a consultation paper that has gone out, and that consultation paper is for anybody to be involved. I encourage anybody who is interested in terms of funding to make sure they get involved. AACL is doing just that.

Federal Transfer Payments

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, during the last four years Albertans have collectively risen to the challenge in absorbing significant expenditure reductions to protect the future for our children. Included in these expenditure reductions were significant cuts to the Canada health and social transfer to the province. Assuming that the recent Liberal announcement to cap the transfer payments is not another scrap-the-GST announcement, I would ask the Provincial Treasurer to explain what this will mean to health, education, and social services in this province.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. The viewing audience, however many there are at 3 in the morning, will have missed something here because when the Member for Red Deer-South was talking about the unfortunate and severe reductions of federal transfers, we actually had the NDP agreeing with the severity of that and the Liberals laughing. I guess it's because it's their cousins that are hitting us.

2:10

It should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that in 1995 this government declared very clearly that even though there would be severe reductions to our health and education and social services transfers, indeed we would not see Albertans affected by those.

We were able to say that as no other province was. We were able to say that because of the Klein administration and our fiscal plan of reducing our own expenses by 20 percent. No other province has done that. We absorbed those reductions.

As I tabled today, Mr. Speaker – it is very interesting to note, and I'll say it again. We had projected that because of federal announcements from 1992 through to the end of 1999-2000, we would be reduced by \$765 million in terms of our social transfers. Because of an announcement made yesterday, that reduction will be somewhat less. In effect we are being lashed not 530 million times but only 410 million times.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order.

MR. DOERKSEN: To the same minister: with this less amount of transfer payments is the province obligated to spend this money on the program side, or could it be used for debt reduction?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the question though valid might be hypothetical from this point of view. We have to presume that the Liberals are going to win the election. There are actually two presumptions here. We have to presume that. [some applause] Here the Liberals in this House are applauding their cousins for lashing and slashing us.

We have to presume that they will win the election. Following that, in some people's minds the greater presumption may be that the Liberals are going to follow through with their promise. So there are two presumptions here.

We saw what happened in 1993, when the Liberals promised to reduce the GST. Last time I went to the cash register, I still got lashed 7 percent by the Liberals.

THE SPEAKER: The Speaker will bring out the lash, hon. member.

MR. DOERKSEN: Will the Treasurer assure Albertans that he will make sure that Albertans get equal and fair treatment should this announcement proceed?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, again a presumption, though I'm flattered by the thought that I could possibly have any such influence on the federal government. In fact, the transfer payment now is discriminatory. First of all, as Albertans we recognize the needs in different parts of the country. We recognize that, and different steps have to be taken to meet those needs. But on this particular transfer Albertans need to know that we get the lowest amount of dollars per capita of any other province on these social transfers. As a matter of fact, if you take the average of what other provinces get, we get 80 percent below that per capita social transfer. Do we hear a cry of complaint from the Liberals here to their cousins in Ottawa? No, they don't stand, just like they didn't stand up for the national energy program or any of the other Liberal ills.

Mr. Speaker, we took some very responsible moves in terms of social services two years ago. We are being penalized for that. We will be appealing to the government of Canada to treat us equally, like the rest of Canada, so that we can all share in this abundance.

Greenfield Plastics Inc.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, according to documents that this caucus has obtained, which I'll table in the House, it appears that

in its haste to dispose of public assets to privatize at any cost, this government cabinet through a July 7, 1993, order in council approved the sale of a Calgary ALCB warehouse to Greenfield Plastics for \$9 million plus a \$250,000 interest payment plus adjustments. Now, the really sweet part about this deal is that it appears that the company only needed \$10,000 of its own money for a down payment – that's about one-tenth of 1 percent – and that ALCB mortgaged the remaining \$8,990,000. My question to the Premier: why would his government strike such a sweetheart deal to dispose of a public asset?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I assume it wasn't a sweetheart deal. I assume it was the best that could be negotiated under the market circumstances of the day, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is a perfect example of the Liberals living in the past.

You know, most Albertans are talking about the future, getting on with their lives and so on. These people are talking about something that should have been examined four years ago, and in the ensuing years there was plenty of opportunity to examine these particular transactions. The Auditor General did his annual report. In these reports I have seen nothing untoward. There have been at least three sessions of Public Accounts convened since that particular time. They had an opportunity to raise the issue at that particular time. No. Why now? Why now? You know, we give them plenty of money to do research, but being four years behind in their research is a little much, and I question how they're using that money.

MR. WICKMAN: Let me remind the Premier: accountability means coming clean.

To the Treasurer, Mr. Speaker: would the Treasurer explain to Albertans why this firm would not be required to obtain financing through a private-sector lender like any other Albertan would have to; in other words, why a special deal from ALCB?

MR. DAY: There was no special deal. I don't have the copies of the pages the member is referring to, though I think the types of questions that they're asking now are more properly given in the estimates time or even in Public Accounts.

I will say, however, that in terms of our books, which are being reflected on here, I think it's important to note that the Auditor General has said in his annual report: the government has taken tremendous steps to improve the quality of financial information it provides Albertans. A gentleman by the name of Dr. Mike Percy, the Liberal Treasury critic, in January 1996 said: Alberta has taken a lead in developing progressive accounting policies and financial statement disclosure. Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta has said that today there is no smoke and mirrors in the Alberta government's financial reporting process. I could go on and on: there is no reflection on the efficacy of these accounts.

The specifics: there is no secret sweetheart deal that was made on any of these sales.

MR. WICKMAN: To the Treasurer: with our help you can do a lot better.

My final question, Mr. Speaker, to the minister responsible for public works: will the minister commit to table all details related to this sale in the Legislative Assembly? All details.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: I believe that this particular issue has gone through Public Accounts, and since you already have access to it, I don't see any need for retabling it.

Youth Crime

MR. CAO: Mr. Speaker, related to a concern in my constituency of Calgary-Fort, I'd like to put a question to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister explain what Alberta Justice is doing to address Albertans' concern about their safety, particularly in respect of the growing problem of youth crime?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I'd like to indicate initially is that while youth crime over the past few years has actually been decreasing, serious and violent crime has been on the increase, and we're certainly very concerned about that. In response to that, we've done two things primarily. One is the serious and violent crime strategy, which was implemented a year ago. It's been quite successful thus far, and we're in the process of evaluating the impact that has had.

Secondly and equally as important is the expansion of the alternative approaches in dealing with youth who commit these crimes, and that is aimed at those committing minor offences. The alternative measures have proven to be quite successful to date. One of these measures, for example, is youth justice committees, which have been assisting in an advisory capacity with respect to sentencing and also assisting in the alternative measures program itself. Right now in Alberta we do have 54 designated committees, and we're working very closely with them.

So those are two key areas that we're working on.

2:20

MR. CAO: Mr. Speaker, my constituents of Calgary-Fort have expressed an interest in becoming involved with a youth justice committee. Can the minister provide some information with respect to the status of the request?

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Actually the Dover Youth Justice Committee was formally designated in March of this year. The volunteers for that committee at this present time are receiving training under the Young Offenders Act and the alternative measures program. They will be dealing, as I mentioned earlier, with first- and second-time offenders who have committed minor offences. What this has done really is provide the community with an opportunity to be directly involved, and what I'd be happy to do is provide the member with some additional information so he can distribute that to other areas in his riding and make sure that those who are interested in getting involved can do so.

MR. CAO: Mr. Speaker, my last question is with respect to the funding of these committees. What funding arrangements are made with the Department of Justice, in fact, with the federal government?

MR. HAVELOCK: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the Young Offenders Act expressly forbids remuneration for members of the committees. This is truly a volunteer effort, and that, I think, is one of the reasons why it's been so successful to date. Again, Alberta Justice assists in providing training and clerical assistance and certainly works closely with those committees to address any problems which they may be incurring in their deliberations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Seniors' Tax Rebates

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Provincial Treasurer. Did the changes to the federal age credit result in the broadening of the tax base? Yes or no?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I don't have an answer to that today, but I'll happily have one for him tomorrow.

MR. BONNER: My first supplemental: is the Treasury collecting about \$14 million per year more in provincial income tax from seniors as a result of the changes?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the gentleman asking the question has pursued this \$14 million question for some number of days now, and it's been responded to significantly by the minister responsible for seniors, the Minister of Community Development. I feel the question is being exhausted here. I don't know what more information we could possibly send him, but I'd be happy to send over all the responses to date, which I think have covered this question.

MR. BONNER: Unlike the previous Treasurer, will you keep the Premier's promise and rebate the extra \$14 million per year you are taking from seniors?

MR. DAY: I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker: to save costs and because we believe in reducing administration, I'll personally give him yesterday's *Hansard* copy – I have it here on my desk; I won't even ask the pages to be interrupted from their important work – to give him the answer to that. It's interesting that he does not reflect at all on the Liberal claw-back related to these benefits. It's interesting that he leaves that out.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Advanced Education Tuition Fees

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the election campaign of 1997, as I knocked on doors in the communities of Pincher Creek and the Crowsnest Pass, I encountered many high school students at home, of course, because the teachers were at convention. I looked at this as an opportunity to talk to many of these young people. We talked about opportunities in the vocational field, in trades, in apprenticeship programs, but some of them also expressed concern about the rise of tuition fees that prevented them from attending a university or college. My questions today are to the Minister of Advanced Ed and Career Development. Can the minister please explain the department's tuition fee policy and the intent of that policy?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, prior to the first presentation of the department's business plan back in '94-95, the department held very extensive consultations with stakeholder groups, and it was during that consultation process that the decision was determined that the tuition fee policy would increase. We are expecting students to make a higher investment in their own particular education. So institutions have been allowed to increase tuition up to a level of 30 percent of what is called net operating expenditures.

MS BARRETT: Students didn't ask for that.

MR. DUNFORD: That is true. Students did not ask for that. Students are asking for something different, but taxpayers certainly did, and we're here to respond to them as well as to students.

What we have done, however, to try to mitigate some of the impact on the students is that while institutions can raise tuition, they are restricted as to the amount they can raise them each particular year, and they cannot be at that 30 percent level prior to the year 2000.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, before proceeding, this evening the estimates of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development will be up, so phrase the questions in such a way that they're not leading to anticipation or part of the debate that would normally happen tonight.

MR. COUTTS: Then let me ask the question this way, Mr. Speaker: what types of fees are covered under the policy?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, what we try to do there is cover what we call universal instructional fees, such as tuition and books. We would not attempt to cover some other types of fees that might go along with this, such as student fees, lab coats, that sort of thing.

MR. COUTTS: My last supplementary then: are these fees affordable to students?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has one of the most generous student loan plans. We did not temporize in this particular area; we moved decisively. So what we've done is we're one of the few provinces that provide for remission, and that is an extremely useful tool for students to try to manage the debts that they have at the end of their classes. If we could just get those federal government Liberals to come along with us on the same point, we'd really be getting somewhere.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Canadian Western Bank

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On page 73 of the Provincial Treasurer's Budget '97, under the heading loans and advances, it shows a new entry of \$1 million in favour of the Canadian Western Bank made sometime during the past year. My straightforward questions are to the Provincial Treasurer. Mr. Treasurer, is this sudden appearance of this \$1 million a loan or a loan advance?

MR. DAY: I just happen to have a copy of the budget here, and you're referencing page 73. Mr. Speaker, if you'd allow me a moment. We sometimes get these questions on minutia in estimates or in Public Accounts. Though a million dollars is not a small amount of money, these individual and specific questions sometimes take a moment to find. I believe he's referring to page 73, Budget '97. That's the update. It is on the Canadian Western Bank. The forecast there is \$1 million. If you would turn to the other corresponding pages also in terms the heritage trust fund accounts, you will see graphically, painfully, and in detail all reasons and aspects of these particular listings, all of these loans and advances.

MR. SAPERS: Is it a loan or an advance?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: We're going to find out if it's a loan or an advance eventually, I'm sure.

Would the Provincial Treasurer at least tell us the precise date of that \$1 million transaction?

2:30

MR. DAY: That's not listed in this book. I'll happily get it.

You know what, Mr. Speaker, what we're seeing here – let's face it. We have a process here called Written Questions, where not just the date can be attained. If a member is given some time to do it, dates can be given, precise times of days can be given, but when you open a book like this, ask for an exact date of something when it's not listed, then I have to respond: I'll have the date for him probably within an hour, definitely by tomorrow, as we did today with questions yesterday. If this is the process that they want to follow, to skip Public Accounts, to skip estimates, to skip written questions, and ask tiny questions – who was present; who signed what; what time was it signed? – we have all those answers, Mr. Speaker. We do have them. We will get them, but I don't expect to be yelled at when I don't have it right here and it takes an hour or so to get that.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Perhaps the Provincial Treasurer could answer this question. Is this \$1 million payment over and above the \$911,000 that Alberta taxpayers have already paid out on this CWB loan?

MR. DAY: It's clearly listed in the update right here, Mr. Speaker. That suggests the '97-98 fiscal year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Education Funding

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Education. Throughout the campaign that we recently had – I continue to field a lot of questions and concerns from my constituents regarding our education system in Alberta. I'd like to put that in context of an article that I recently saw in last Saturday's *Calgary Herald* with regards to the TIMS results, where Canada placed 18th in the world in math and science. Could you please comment on concerns my constituents have regarding the adequacy of funding for education in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the article that was referred to, which was a reprint in *The Calgary Herald*, was an original article that appeared in the April 4 issue of *The Economist* magazine. In that article there was an analysis of the TIMS results, the third international math and sciences study. The TIMS report did a study involving 48 countries, and Alberta was one of the jurisdictions that had a large enough population to stand as its own individual result.

Just as a way of correction, although Alberta placed in the top one-third in the area of math, in the area of science our students placed number three in the world, following only behind Korea and Japan.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to funding of education in this province for 1997-98 our budget will be in the magnitude of \$2.99 billion. That is approximately one-half of one percent lower than it was in 1992-93. One of the interesting things that is pointed

out in the TIMS report is that some of the countries that participated in TIMS who did very well in their student results in fact had classroom sizes of 50 and 60. That's pointed out in this article. Also, some of the countries that did exceptionally well spent relatively less money than many North American jurisdictions do.

I'm not suggesting that we need to further reduce our education budget. We are finished with our budget cuts, and we are investing in certain areas. I'm not suggesting either, Mr. Speaker, that we should increase our classroom sizes to 50 or 60. But I think it does raise sufficient evidence to look into these questions as to what the relationship is between funding levels and quality of education. We have an outstanding quality here, Mr. Speaker, but we also strive to get value for our dollar.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to follow up my second question to the same Minister of Education. Given that there certainly are options on the amount of funding and class sizes as to how we approach our education, what are you doing to ensure that we have the appropriate level of funding and, for that matter, class size in our Alberta schools?

MR. MAR: Well, class sizes are an interesting question to me, Mr. Speaker, because we often hear about class sizes that are in the range of 32, 33, 34, 35, or more, but we don't often hear about class sizes when there are 12 or 14 or 15 kids in a classroom. On average we know that class sizes are typically somewhere in the mid to high 20s.

With respect to the question as it relates to how we are monitoring our costs, we do monitor our costs in terms of where spending is being done. We want to make sure that the majority of the dollars that we spend in education are being spent in the instructional area and not in administration. With respect to capital we have increased capital budgets because we do recognize that as our school buildings are getting older and older, there are more dollars required for education, and we have increased that. It's something that we do continue to monitor on an annual basis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Grizzly Bears

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Grizzly bears are on the provincial blue list, which means they're vulnerable and at risk of becoming an endangered species. The population estimates are as low as 500 bears in this province, which is certainly nowhere near the provincial target of 1,000 animals. Will the Minister of Environmental Protection impose a moratorium on hunting grizzly bears until the target population is reached?

MR. LUND: No, Mr. Speaker.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, how can this government claim to take a leadership role in wildlife management when they refuse to impose a simple moratorium on killing vulnerable mammals? This is what you said in this paper.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, we manage wildlife throughout this province in management units. Many of those management units already have a grizzly bear population that is pretty well at the maximum. It's true that there are other areas that can use more bears, and certainly those areas are excluded from the areas where there is some harvest.

Another thing that the hon. member is probably not aware of is that the average harvest of grizzly bears in a year is about 12 animals, and of that, three-quarters are males. The last time I checked, the males do not have to be around to raise the cubs.

MS CARLSON: The numbers are declining, and they're nowhere near the standards. Will the minister at least set up an independent panel to provide scientifically acceptable evidence of the current grizzly population in Alberta and determine whether or not the 1,000 animals, which you're not reaching now, is even too low a figure?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the number that was quoted earlier, about 500, is not accurate. In fact, the number is somewhere around 800. We don't know exactly, because it is difficult to get an accurate count. But the fact is that the hunt has been going on for a number of years, and the population has been increasing while that harvest is occurring.

Another thing that I think is very important to point out is that many of those animals that are harvested are old animals. Many of them are animals that in fact have become accustomed to people. Many of those animals become dangerous, so we believe that in some respects we probably are in fact creating a situation that is safer for the interface of bears and humans.

Another thing that many people overlook is the fact that in some areas, once your population increases to a certain level, the older male animals will kill the cubs. So leaving, in fact, those male animals too dense in an area doesn't increase the grizzly bear population.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Under Members' Statements today, first of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Alberta Library Week

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to talk about a very positive and exciting initiative in an area that we sometimes take for granted as it's such an integral part of our community life: the public library. The hon. Minister of Community Development has designated April 27 to May 3 as the first-ever Alberta Library Week.

Albertans certainly have something to celebrate when it comes to the libraries. In most communities they're the hub of activity, centres for lifelong learning, and sources of information on almost any topic. Everyone from students to seniors, businesspeople to hobbyists can find invaluable resources at the library. Special-needs material such as talking books are also widely available.

2:40

We've come a long way since 1907 when the Libraries Act was first passed by the province. Very few libraries existed in Alberta 90 years ago. Some of them were based in private homes. Now over 95 percent of our population has access to public library services through 308 service points from Acme to Zama City.

In Calgary our public library is a source of pride. We applaud the fact that in 1995 for the fourth year in a row the Calgary Public Library was Canada's busiest public library, with 5.5 million customer visits. On this Friday of Library Week appropriately there will be a sod-turning ceremony for Calgary's newest

branch at Signal Hill, which will further increase the service to Calgarians.

Today libraries are embracing the latest technologies to increase their service capabilities. For example, even the homeless in Calgary have access to the Internet and E-mail at the main branch. With the implementation of the electronic library network, by the year 2001 Alberta's public libraries will be poised to provide provincewide services to the world of information available on-line.

Mr. Speaker, may I suggest to the members of this Assembly that we celebrate Library Week by visiting our local public library and give Alberta's libraries our full support.

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

Child Welfare

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. The Department of Family and Social Services has released numerous reports that cite that child safety and child welfare is a paramount objective. Enter three youngsters, whose names will remain in confidence, who for the better part of their young lives have been repeatedly subjected to the unreliable revolving door of social services' placement and retraction and to repeated instances of neglect and abuse at the hands of their parents. At one and a half, eight, and 11 these children's experiences do not meet the standards the government so eloquently waxes about in department positions and documents.

In December '96 the children's aunts described their experience with the department as follows: the children were apprehended, placed in the family's care, then returned to their mother, who continued to drink and make poor decisions regarding their safety. When this became too obvious for social services to ignore, the father was given custody, also an alcoholic, and the case was closed without further monitoring. As part of the father being permitted to move the children to their seventh living situation and fourth school in 10 months, he must demonstrate, the family said, that he is able to provide a safe and stable environment. Undoubtedly, even the most hard-hearted person might comment that such ridiculous bureaucratic bumbling and dismissal of this case involving the lives of three innocent children is unacceptable.

The responses of the past Minister of Family and Social Services to the family on these concerns attempted to assure the family that reasonable precautions have been put in place and directed the extended family to be the watchdog of these children's welfare. When apprehension reports repeatedly cited abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse and the parents' failure on every count to fulfill requirements in the 1996 June service plan, Mr. Speaker, why would the department allow the parents one week ago to remove the youngest child, at one and a half, from the grandmother's care and take her to a remote bush camp in B.C.?

This is a sickening, shameful statement, Mr. Speaker, on the status of children's welfare in the province. The youngest, at one and a half, is somewhere in B.C. in a remote camp with two adults that have repeatedly neglected her. The government's principals and their department have not intervened to this date.

Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to speak on a government of Alberta agricultural initiative. The Alberta environmentally sustainable agriculture program was recently introduced this year. This Alberta government initiative represents a doubling in

provincial funding dedicated to environmentally sustainable agriculture programming. The programs will help develop and maintain environmentally sustainable management practices and technologies in the agriculture sector. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is responsible for encouraging the agriculture industry to take care of the soil and water resources it uses.

The minister of agriculture is inviting nominations to a new Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture Council. This council will evaluate environmental challenges and opportunities facing the agrifood industry, encourage the industry to proactively address environmental issues, and direct the Alberta environmentally sustainable agriculture program. Mr. Speaker, in the tradition of this government's consultation process, the council will include a cross section of the agrifood industry and stakeholders, including representatives from environmental and wildlife organizations, aboriginal groups, the three levels of government, and key industry organizations such as the Agriculture and Food Industry Council and the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute. With a strong industry and stakeholder representation this council will have an integrated approach to environmental challenges in helping the agrifood industry find ways to protect the environment while competing in world markets. This is an initiative that this government and the citizens of Alberta can be proud of.

THE SPEAKER: During question period today two points of order were raised. On the points of order, hon. members, would you please be prepared to provide the citations.

The first, Edmonton-Riverview. Hon. member.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I raise a point of order under Standing Order 23(i): imputing false motives. The statistic that I cited in my question to the Minister of Family and Social Services, that 260 children had been neglected or injured in care, is not reported by the department. The minister in his comments appeared to suggest that it had been. I have a copy of the '95-96 annual report, and the statistic is not cited there, nor is it cited in any other form in any other departmental report that I can find. I would conclude that the minister was basically inferring that he has in fact reported that. I in fact calculated that figure based on the figures absent from the report in the '95-96 summary.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think all the hon. minister was trying to do at that time was respond to very specific statistics. It's difficult when of course you're in question period and specific references are not made to documents or you don't have those at hand.

On the other point, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe there is a point of order. It's simply a question of interpretation and clarification.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to respond, in Budget '97 one of the performance indicators is "percentage of children who stay free from abuse or neglect while in the Ministry's care." It is put in as a percentage of total children in care. In 1993-94 it was 97.0 percent. In '94-95 it was 97.1 percent. In '95-96 the projected target was 98.4 percent and

going on to become 100 percent, which would be zero children that would actually have abuse or neglect upon them while in our care. That's exactly what my answer was.

THE SPEAKER: On the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, prior to getting that point of order, there was a situation that developed several times today – and the Government House Leader just alluded to it – and that is reference to documents. If hon. members want to quote from documents, hon. members must be prepared to table, file those documents at the moment in which they quote from them. In terms of what we indicated the other day, that means the appropriate number of documents must be ready. That's the only way that we can really deal with the veracity and the certainty of any particular kind of quotation.

2:50

In terms of the exchange, in terms of the purported point of order raised by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, oftentimes during the day in a parliament there may be the odd moment that hon. members might be able to do some reading. One of the documents that we use in this particular facility is *Beauchesne*. May I just draw all members' attention to *Beauchesne* 494, "Acceptance of the Word of a Member."

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible.

And this is the line that I would like to underline for myself. "On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident." It would appear that today in essence we have two interpretations of the basic facts. That will happen sometimes. Thank heavens somebody once calculated that this should be the rule of the House rather than to find wisdom in a particular Speaker on a particular day.

Opposition House Leader, you had another point?

Point of Order Oral Questions

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the fact that you've commended *Beauchesne* to everybody's bedtime reading, because I'm going to quote a number of sections, starting with section 409, which reads:

A brief question seeking information about an important matter of some urgency which falls within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Minister to whom it is addressed, is in order.

Beauchesne 409(3):

The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.

Mr. Speaker, the question from Red Deer-South seemed to be in violation of 409(3).

If you read further, 409(5) reads:

The matter ought to be of some urgency. There must be some present value in seeking the information during the Question Period rather than through the Order Paper or through correspondence with the Minister or department.

It certainly seems to me that clearly it was in violation of 409(5), as that member has ample opportunity to meet with members of the front bench. At least we're told that they would. It wasn't a

matter of urgency and certainly could have been dealt with through correspondence.

Further in 409 we get to 409(11):

A question which seeks an opinion about government policy is probably out of order in that it asks for an opinion and not information.

Clearly that's what the exchange was, and the minister in answering the question even went further afield and brought in a number of issues that had nothing to do with the question and in fact talked about a different level of government, of which of course he has no known competence.

I'm reading again from subsection (11), Mr. Speaker.

A question asking for a general statement of government policy may be out of order in that it requires a long answer that should be made on motions [now statements by ministers] or in debate.

The question being as open and as leading as it was would tend to violate that clause in subsection (11) as well.

Other questions inevitably deal with government policy and the general restrictions regarding such questions have never been applied.

The Treasurer of course takes ample opportunity to go off on whatever tangent is his fancy at the moment when asked such leading questions.

Mr. Speaker, further to my point of order I would like to briefly also refer you to *Beauchesne* 410(5), where it reads: "The primary purpose of the Question Period is the seeking of information and calling the Government to account." Now, it doesn't say so directly in subsection (5), but I'm sure that the intent is the parliament in question; in other words, calling this government to account, not some other level of government, not the Treasurer's opinion about what may or may not happen with some other level of government's policy. Certainly members of the public, people in the gallery, members on this side of the House, and I daresay members sitting behind the front bench as well are sick and tired of having ministers put up some backbenchers to ask these leading questions so that they can engage in some other level of politics that suits whatever agenda they may be interested in, that have nothing at all to do with calling this government to account for their policies, which is the primary purpose of question period.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again looking at *Beauchesne*, my final citation for you is under the general heading Replies to Oral Questions. It's *Beauchesne* 417. I certainly hope that all members of the front bench are listening, particularly the Treasurer. "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate."

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Relating first of all to the specifics, I think the comments of the Opposition House Leader are both outrageous and timely and, as a matter of fact, welcome.

First of all, in terms of outrageous, if I can use a term so often brought to your attention by our friend from Grande Prairie, a member has stood in this House now today and dared to presume that a question raised by another MLA is of no importance to that MLA's constituents. I find that outrageous. The Member for Red Deer-South on a huge announcement by the Liberal government just yesterday – a huge announcement – said that his constituents were concerned about that, and another member has stood and said: that's no big deal, of no concern. I find that somewhat outrageous.

The timely part of it is that on our side of the House right here we were just giving consideration as to how we could most graciously approach your office to ask you to speculate and in fact possibly give us some direction on the manner in which questions

have been placed in this House – and again today – by members of the opposition: questions of which we sent *Hansard* copies over; questions that come straight out of Public Accounts, that are listed there as to the page, verse, and chapter, quoted and quotable; questions which relate to narrow topics that have nothing to do with policy; and if it's calling to account, questions that are already fully accounted for in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say this in all sincerity: I am very thankful that the Opposition House Leader has raised this point today to give you that opportunity to give us some direction on the types of questions that we've seen over the last few days on very specific amounts, which traditionally find themselves on the record in Orders of the Day and in written questions, motions for returns, Public Accounts, estimates. That is how the parliamentary system is designed. When a member stands up to comment on a billion dollar election promise by the Prime Minister and how that's going to impact his constituents and the member across says that that's no big deal, I am outraged, like my friend the member from Grande Prairie.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, if I might also address this point of order. I do appreciate the hon. House leader of the opposition bringing this to our attention again. Of course, we know in this House that when a person asks a question, I can't predict what the answer is going to be. I can't tell the minister how to answer the question. But there is an obligation for me as a private member to ask questions that are of importance.

When we table a budget in this House, which includes and takes into account transfers from the government of Canada, it makes a huge impact in terms of how we do our budget planning, where we will spend our money, and how effectively we might spend that money. So if there is a change, an announcement made by the federal government that is going to change the assumptions under which we did our budgeting in estimates, then it is incumbent upon us to ask the questions.

Furthermore, I want to add that in my last question I asked the Treasurer what he was going to do to represent Alberta to the federal government. It is his job in this matter, as far as I'm concerned, to hold the federal government to account to make sure that Alberta gets a fair and square deal for the money that we get back from the federal government. I think it's highly appropriate.

THE SPEAKER: I am reminded, hon. members, that this is the parliament of the province of Alberta. I'm also reminded of some sage advice given to this person a long time ago when he was a rookie parliamentarian. The advice given to me by a sage member of this Assembly was: it's a lot easier to talk your way out of this Assembly than it ever was to talk your way into it.

In terms of the purported point of order today, the longer one seems to participate in the debate on points of order, perhaps the greater the amount of permutations and combinations there are in which respect the Speaker might provide some advice. So I will cut to the chase and just refer hon. members to *Beauchesne* 409(1), referring to questions. "It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate." I would draw that to all members' attention. That deals with the question side. Then I would draw to all members' attention *Beauchesne* 417, which refers to the reply side of the question. "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate." Now, two pretty simple rules. If all members followed those

things, we wouldn't have purported points of order at the end of question period.

In terms of the matter of the question that was raised by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, I think that the question was a serious question to the Speaker. This was a major announcement made by a national leader yesterday which does have implications for the economy of the province of Alberta, and it certainly falls within the jurisdiction, the ability of hon. members to raise it.

In terms of the other comments that might have been argumentative and other than seeking information, I think that the wise arguments provided by all three hon. members who did participate in this point of order should be recognized by all members of this House. I think we've got an imperfect expression of the ideal that has happened here with this purported point of order.

Let's now move forward with Orders of the Day.

head: **Orders of the Day**
 3:00
 head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than**
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
 head: **Second Reading**
Bill 203
Off-highway Vehicle Amendment Act, 1997

[Adjourned debate April 23: Mr. Tannas]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I did conclude my remarks on Bill 203 last day.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few comments on Bill 203 and maybe put some questions out to the sponsor of the Bill that he could maybe reply to in Committee of the Whole.

We always want to see people safe. Generally I'm quite in support of the Bill, especially given the speed that skidoos can go now. I guess my one question about this is: do they have to wear their helmets on their own private land? If a farmer is going to go out to the barn to do some chores, does he have to put a helmet on? How are you going to enforce that one? [interjection] I can't believe I agree with the hon. Minister of Energy. It quite honestly scares me. We obviously must agree on one concern about this Bill.

I take this out to the people in my riding. Certainly those who skidoo a great deal and who have very high-powered machines wear helmets. Those people on old clunkers – I have a few of them pieced together in my garage, which I'm sure you can relate to – don't go very fast. It's not that I'm opposed to helmets on them; I'm just talking about the reality of enforcing this. I don't see how you can do it on private property when people are just running out to check on the cows or something like that. I mean, I support the safety aspect and wearing helmets. I don't know how that will address hitting barbed-wire fences, which is another issue. I don't know how we address that. Certainly helmets will make people safer, but I do question implementing wearing them on private land. Those are my concerns with Bill 203. Generally I support it, but enforcing it might be a problem.

There are a few other things I just want to say about Bill 203

before we keep going. Generally it has to do with skidoo safety across this province. Out where I live – many of you know Big Lake – there are often skidoo races and those kinds of things. This is another contentious issue out there: are we going to make people have licences for riding on private or public land? These are some of the concerns that have come to me. Some of course are for it; some are opposed to it, naturally.

Tied in with vehicle safety, is there legislation that binds the sale of a snowmobile to include registration? Recently there was legislation about old vehicles that had to be checked through before they were sold. Are we looking at those kinds of things with skidoos? I realize this is just a small part of the whole Off-highway Vehicle Amendment Act.

As you know, many members on our side have spoken to this, maybe one or two. But since for many of them it's an organized activity and a sport, they have a different view of it. People living in the city put their skidoos on trailers and drive out to the country and zip around. Well, of course those people are going to have helmets. But the reality in rural Alberta is that we hop on a skidoo and zip out for all kinds of reasons. It's not a sport; it's a vehicle that we use on our farms and on our acreages. How do you balance that? How do you enforce this? I'd like to hear what other people are saying in that regard. I can see it almost as a rural versus an urban issue in some cases. Heaven forbid we would say that out loud in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, that there are issues that are different for different reasons.

The Alberta Snowmobile Association has reported that there have been no deaths reported on organized trails in Alberta, and I encourage that kind of activity. To me the greatest issue is that many people have been hurt, scarred, maimed, killed because of barbed-wire fences, people skidooing late at night or in all kinds of conditions or at great speeds. I mean, have we even addressed the issue of the speeds of these machines and how powerful they can be or are allowed to be? Should we look at these very powerful machines being restricted to recreational areas? That would be a real hotbed in rural Alberta certainly.

DR. WEST: But what about private ownership?

MRS. SOETAERT: Pardon me, Mr. Minister? I was on his side for a moment, but I've lost him again, Mr. Speaker. It happens all the time in here.

Back to barbed-wire fences. I don't know what we can do about that issue. Certainly one of the greatest concerns in the rural part of my riding is the barbed-wire fences that people run into. Actually all winter they will even drive through the same area and suddenly spring comes and there's a wire they didn't even know was there, and we've seen a lot of people hurt. Maybe the government is looking at finding more organized trails or places where people can safely skidoo at the high speeds that they go.

To conclude my comments quickly, my two concerns that I'd like addressed, if the sponsor of the Bill can, are: how are you going to enforce this on private land, and is it expected that people on their own property will be wearing helmets just to go do chores? I mean, generally I support the Bill; of course it's the safety of all the people in the province. But the reality of enforcing it might be difficult.

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

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to comment on the Off-highway Vehicle Amendment Act brought forward by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. Although my constituency is in the city of Calgary, I have constituents who enjoy getting out of the city on weekends to get some fresh air and enjoy our great scenery on their snowmobiles.

MR. LUND: Good, clean air.

3:10

MR. AMERY: Good, clean air.

I know that my safety-minded constituents, especially those who snowmobile, will be interested in this private member's Bill. So far in this discussion on this Bill we have focused on the number of snowmobile fatalities this year. Granted, Mr. Speaker, 11 fatalities in one season is quite a high number, but I think we are forgetting about the countless other accidents which occur each winter. Unfortunately, fatalities gather more media attention than some of the lesser accidents, but they are accidents nonetheless, and someone gets hurt. This Bill does as much to reduce the chance of serious injury in an accident as it does to reduce the chance of getting killed.

Mr. Speaker, human heads are delicate. It does not take much to injure one's brain, and in some cases all that is required is a bump. Broken bones and muscle strains are much easier to heal than brain injuries, which in many cases are permanent. Not only do these brain injuries result in a financial cost to our health care system, but more importantly, there is a human cost. The lives of both the individuals and their families can be profoundly changed depending on the extent of the injury.

The good news is that snowmobile-related head injuries can be completely avoided. Mr. Speaker, this is why we are hearing of such emphasis on the use of bicycle helmets in the city of Calgary. This is one of the reasons that I'm able to support Bill 203. There is absolutely no reason that any Albertan should suffer any sort of head injury while snowmobiling. This Bill goes a long way to ensuring that.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill will also help promote a greater awareness of snowmobile safety issues. For example, if someone should go into a snowmobile dealership today and buy a snowmobile, the odds are that the dealer would encourage the purchase of a helmet as well. Part of the dealer's motivation could be profit, but they do have a vested interest in snowmobile safety. If the perception exists that snowmobiles are unsafe, sales will go down. In fact, most dealers now walk new buyers through basic safety instructions before they leave the shop. However, today the person buying a snowmobile can say to the dealer, "No, I will buy the helmet later," or "No, thanks; I don't need a helmet." They take the snowmobile home, and the next weekend they are out on it without a helmet.

So what happens, Mr. Speaker, when our new rider tries to go around the corner on a trail too fast and is thrown into a tree? What happens if our new rider has a family and takes the kids out for a ride and they're thrown from the machine? This example is not a common one since most riders wear helmets to keep their heads warm, if for nothing else. However, it does get easier to see how by not wearing a helmet a person can become quite literally an accident just waiting to happen.

Most jurisdictions in this country have mandated the use of helmets by drivers and passengers. In fact, British Columbia and Alberta are the only two provinces who do not require it. Saskatchewan will be putting helmet legislation in place later this year. Picture it this way, Mr. Speaker. When we travel from

one province to the next along the highways, we feel fairly safe. This is largely due to the fact that even though other provinces have different pieces of legislation, they are similar to our own. We have a fairly consistent standard of safety between our provinces' highways. This is not the same with the snowmobile. Because we currently have no legislation mandating snowmobile helmets, do visitors regard us as being unsafe? Personally I'm not sure that that's the message I want out there about our province.

When we are driving from one part of the country to another, we expect a certain level of safety to be met. What about a snowmobiler from Ontario who has taken their mandatory training and has their snowmobiler's licence? Would they feel safe on a trail in Alberta knowing that there is no minimal instructional requirement for snowmobilers in Alberta and that they don't need helmets? This would be similar to the rest of us going to a city with no traffic lights, no traffic lanes, and no rules. Granted, Mr. Speaker, traffic patterns do develop. But who is to say that those patterns are consistent with those elsewhere?

For these reasons I was pleased to see the Member for Livingstone-Macleod bring this Bill forward. It will help us become a little more consistent with the rest of the country, something which will become increasingly important as cross-Canada trails are developed. I was also happy to hear about the work the snowmobile safety task force is doing. Their report should go a long way to alleviating concerns over the level of safety we maintain in this province.

Mr. Speaker, as the member speaking before me pointed out, the question of mandatory snowmobile helmets is really not that different from the mandatory use of seat belts or motorcycle helmets, for that matter. When the government made motorcycle helmets mandatory many years ago, it helped create a culture of safety around motorcycles. This differs from the situation with the snowmobiles largely due to the amount of time that has passed since the motorcycle legislation was passed. There has not been time for a culture of safety regarding snowmobile helmets to develop. This Bill will help to develop this safe attitude. This Bill merely makes it a formality that snowmobile helmets be worn.

There are many things in this world that have been regulated by governments at the provincial level, the municipal level, or the federal level that are largely based on common sense. They are legislated anyway for the protection of the citizen whom that level of government serves. The government also establishes standards for many things. Very little goes unaffected by a government standard. This ranges from the light bulbs that are illuminating this House to the speed that we drive our cars at to the quality of food that we eat. Yes, there are even standards for the impact resistance of snowmobile helmets.

Personally, Mr. Speaker, I find it reassuring to know that standards have been set to help ensure my safety. This is what we are trying to do here this afternoon with this Bill. The majority of Alberta snowmobilers are safe drivers. At the same time, it does concern them that there have been cases of snowmobilers cutting through fences, riding where they are unwanted, or harassing livestock. If you look hard enough, you can find bad stories about anything, and snowmobiling is no exception. However, this Bill is a good-news story.

This Bill proposes to take a step towards increasing the level of safety of our snowmobile industry. The majority of snowmobilers are already wearing helmets, and I applaud them for doing so. They are not the people that this Bill is trying to protect. Those who will benefit the most from this Bill are the children and

young people in this province who are riding on snowmobiles or driving them. Most people wear helmets just because it is common sense. Unfortunately, common sense tends to develop more as we get older. For this reason, this Bill should help keep our young people safe.

Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, this is a good Bill that is long overdue. It is my hope that in implementing this piece of legislation, we will move towards a greater awareness of snowmobile safety and be able to look forward to a safer 1997-98 winter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I rise to join in debate over Bill 203, Off-highway Vehicle Amendment Act. It's a particular pleasure because I am a snowmobiler and have been for 32 years, so I feel I can speak with some expertise in this area. This was a family activity for my family, and I still ride with my father, who's now in his 70s, my nephew, my partner, and other members of our family. So it is an intergenerational recreational activity for us.

3:20

We have been members of the Alberta Snowmobile Association through organized clubs throughout the province, and after I was no longer riding with an organized club, I joined as an individual member. This organization as an umbrella organization is an important one to snowmobilers, and they have a lot of safety workshops that they have tried to implement over the years. Safety is a primary interest to anyone that's involved in this recreational sport. We're doing it for fun, and obviously we want to take care of ourselves and our own when we participate in it.

Nowadays helmets are a standard item of apparel for the snowmobiling sport. Most people wear them for warmth. We have now moved generally to full-face helmets from the open helmets, and this addresses some of my colleague's concerns about barbed-wire fences. With the full-face helmets your head's down, and it's harder for the barbed wire to get at you. To be honest, all the many people I've ridden with – and recently I've ridden with a lot of farmers, ranchers, a few people that race snowmobiles – already wear helmets. I have not seen anyone riding in the last 10 years that wasn't wearing one. So I suspect that this is a good Bill, and it's a good initiative to put forward. I doubt that it will need to be enforced with very many people. Most people already participate in it.

The safety factors that bring the need for helmets to the fore – many people have commented on the more advanced construction and mechanics of snowmobiles themselves in this day and age. What that actually has given us is a better ride; it is easier to stay on. I'm a little appalled at the speeds at which people seem to believe we can manage to stay on the snowmobiles; 100 kilometres an hour, 160 kilometres an hour I have yet to see.

MRS. SOETAERT: How fast can they go?

MS BLAKEMAN: Some of them can go that speed, but they're not doing it with a person on it, and they certainly are not doing it on most terrain that you would find. On most trails you're riding at about 30 kilometres, 15 kilometres an hour. So the speed that a number of people have been referring to just is not a factor that comes into play.

One of the factors that does come into play around safety is the lights. A lot of the accidents that happen are happening in not the

most optimal lighting conditions, right around dusk. So better lights on the machines, front and back, would also help with the safety of them. Most important – and you've heard it a number of times from different people in this discussion – are marked trails for snowmobilers. On the highway you have signage that tells you what's coming up, that allows you to adjust your driving speed or the way you're progressing. The same sort of thing available on marked trails for snowmobiles is going to give us a very good safety record and make it a lot more fun for people as well.

The marked trails I've ridden on unfortunately have never been in Alberta because we have very few marked trails here. There were three areas that were set up sometime in the late '70s, in my memory. Pincher Creek was one, and it's an excellent recreational area. The other two areas were Sibbald Creek and McLean Creek just out of Calgary. Unfortunately, they're just about useless, and they're not used much anymore. You trailer for 45 minutes to get there, unload your machines, ride around in a circle for 20 minutes, and that's the experience. So people aren't making use of them because the ride simply isn't long enough.

I would like to see more investigation put into marked trails in this province. We have a lot of land that we could be using for that. It's a great tourism draw. When people have a place to go that's challenging and interesting for them to ride, you have less problem with damage to property. Some people were talking about cutting fences. You just don't get that if people have an interesting place to go, and they want to do that. It's also safer for them and big tourism dollars, lots of money coming in. I take my tourism dollars out of Alberta because there's no place for me to ride in a really challenging way. I go to B.C., I go to Montana, and I go to Wyoming. That tourism dollar could be staying here but, folks, it's not very attractive. So let's see what we can do about that.

The issue of rural Alberta and the private versus public lands. Again, I don't see that this is an issue. Everyone I know already wears the helmets, and I think that the legislation should cover anyone. The Bill is silent on whether it's on public or private property, and I think it should be.

There are 120,000 snowmobiles in Alberta. Only 15,000 to 18,000 of them are registered. What are we doing wrong that we can't entice more people to register their snowmobiles? I don't think it's a matter of punitive behaviour here. That's been tried in the past, and it's not making the slightest bit of difference. So what could we be doing that would entice, be more of a carrot, for instance, to get people to register their machines?

If I might just make a suggestion. Perhaps we could look at the decal system that's being used in Ontario and other places in the United States, which is a system of registration. When you buy the machine, it stays on the machine. It's easy to see if it needs to be seen for some reason, for bylaw enforcement. Maybe consider having a dollar or a small amount off that registration fee go towards trail development. Part of the reason they have such magnificent trails in the States is that they use money off the gas taxes. It's just an unbelievable system there. I'd like to see trail development here, and I'd like to see some money put towards it.

I realize other people want to speak. I'm talking faster and faster as I go, so I will wind that up. I am supportive of this Bill. I think it's a good one, and I'd like to see more support for recreational snowmobiling in Alberta.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this

opportunity to make some comments on Bill 203, recognizing that time is short in this opportunity to debate this Bill. I want to say at the outset that certainly I commend the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for the intent that I believe he brings with this Bill, the intent to improve safety in a recreational activity that is very, very popular in our province.

However, I do have some concerns with the Bill, and I would like to take a few moments to outline a number of those concerns. I believe the number of deaths from snowmobiling this winter has raised this issue with all of us. However, I have not seen any statistics that show that helmets in any of those cases would have prevented those tragedies. That raises the concern that I have with the Bill. I believe that we do have to develop some safety guidelines or standards or educational information for snowmobilers. I do understand that there is a task force in place that is now studying the whole issue of snowmobile safety and how we should address some of those concerns so that in future years we can prevent many tragedies from occurring.

Another concern I raise with this Bill is the issue of it being an off-highway recreational vehicle primarily and the issue of private land. I become very concerned, Mr. Speaker, when I see the number of times that we impact a person's rights on their private property. So I have to look at that factor and weigh that factor. I am in an agricultural area. While snowmobiles primarily are used for recreation, they are also used on the farm, often for short trips undoubtedly, but they are used in many cases in farmwork, as is other off-highway transportation.

The task force, I believe, can look at those issues, can debate those issues, and can give us some very good advice as to how we can do this. My understanding is . . .

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Community Development, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business is concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

3:30 Policy Development Committees

501. Mr. Mitchell moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that committees dealing with policy development have representation from both government and opposition Members of the Legislative Assembly.

[Debate adjourned April 22: Mr. Sapers speaking]

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support Motion 501 and conclude my colleague's statements on that. Our position on this motion remains that the current committee structure in the Legislature is partisan, and therefore it erodes and diminishes the legitimacy of the Legislative Assembly. We fundamentally believe that it is essential to ensure that all committees that operate within this Assembly dealing with policy development have representation from both government and opposition members. This motion calls for the government to allow all of Alberta's representatives to take part in policy-making decisions that impact all Albertans. Therefore, we believe that people on both sides of the House should support this motion.

We continue to believe that the question should be asked: why won't the government allow MLAs to take part in the policy-making? What is it that they fear? A more accountable and open

policy-making process leads to better policies because you have more people to draw new ideas from. You have competition amongst individuals to bring forward the best possible ideas, and you have additional research to back up these areas. We think that that would make for a much more responsible government here in the Assembly and to the people throughout the province.

It comes as some surprise to us that it has such lack of support from the government members. In fact, we feel so strongly about this, Mr. Speaker, that a point of privilege was brought forward by the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* sometime past with regard to this. His point of privilege talked about members of the House other than government members having their privilege breached by not being able to participate. Some of the reasons that he stipulated were that because only government members were chosen to serve on these committees and, further, that because public funds were used to remunerate those members, government members were receiving an advantage not available to other members of this House.

He talked at that point, too, about the dignity of this House and the responsibility we have to fairly represent all people. Certainly at some point in time both sides of this House will want to go to their respective caucus offices and discuss how it is that they'll get to the policy. But we're talking about the input stage, the stage when people come and make a presentation. Then both sides of the House should have equal opportunity to hear what it is they have to say, to both hear exactly the same information, and to be able to walk away from that table and discuss how they will further develop that by accepting or rejecting policy or using the information that was provided to work towards a betterment of the House. I think that these are serious considerations, and in a truly open and accountable government this government would be supporting those.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude, urging all members on both sides to support this motion.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

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

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the Chair]

For the motion:

Barrett	MacDonald	Sapers
Blakeman	Massey	Sloan
Bonner	Mitchell	Soetaert
Carlson	Nicol	White
Gibbons	Pannu	Zwozdesky
Leibovici		

Against the motion:

Amery	Graham	McFarland
Black	Haley	Melchin
Boutilier	Havelock	O'Neill
Broda	Herard	Paszkowski
Burgener	Hierath	Pham
Cao	Hlady	Renner
Cardinal	Jacques	Severtson
Clegg	Johnson	Shariff
Coutts	Klapstein	Stelmach
Day	Laing	Stevens
Doerksen	Langevin	Strang
Ducharme	Lougheed	Tannas
Dunford	Lund	Trynchy
Friedel	Magnus	West
Fritz	Marz	Woloshyn
Gordon	McClellan	Yankowsky
Totals:	For - 16	Against - 48

[Motion lost]

Highway 2 Marker Signs

502. Mrs. Gordon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to install kilometre marker signs along the Highway 2 corridor between Calgary and Edmonton as a means of providing more accurate location descriptions for stranded motorists and response locations for local emergency services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to bring this motion forward today. This has been a serious concern for several of my constituents for a long period of time. A form of this motion has been on the Order Paper twice in the past few years, and I'm looking forward to debating it today.

My constituency, Lacombe-Stettler, comprises superior transportation routes including 14 secondary highways and six primary highways. May it be duly noted that Lacombe is located along the Highway 2 corridor. We have made it a priority in this province to establish and maintain an efficient and effective transportation system for all Albertans, a transportation system which is able to support the needs of the agriculture, oil, and manufacturing industries as well as facilitate the growth of those industries, that an evolution in Alberta's economy over the years has changed. We have recognized the impressive impact each of these industries has had on the economy and that each relies on our infrastructure to ensure their success. This is the Alberta advantage, and we are willing to do what is within our purview to ensure that we continue to build on this advantage to secure the future well-being of Albertans and Alberta companies. This includes maintaining and, where necessary, enhancing our transportation system. The communities all across this province have benefited from our consideration of the system and our foresight.

I believe the motion I have brought forward today will serve to further enhance transportation and infrastructure in this province. This motion urges the government "to install kilometre marker

signs along the Highway 2 corridor between Calgary and Edmonton." I will endeavour to explain why I feel this is an issue which should be addressed.

We have all seen distance confirmation marker signs along highways in Alberta, and in fact we find them all over the world. To motorists these signs confirm the distance to the next community, town, or city. They serve the important purpose of allowing motorists to determine their requirements and the distance to amenities. They serve this purpose efficiently and effectively and are placed at lengthy intervals for that reason. The kilometre marker signs which are specified in this motion serve a very different purpose. I will first outline exactly what they are and how they are expected to work to give you and the Assembly an understanding of their place on the highway and what they can be used for.

3:50

The Transportation Association of Canada, or TAC, is a nonprofit association with involvement from both the public and private sectors. The TAC promotes the provision of safe, efficient, effective, and environmentally sustainable transportation services to support Canada's social and economical goals. The TAC plays an important role in assisting provinces to develop standard integrated transportation and distribution systems by operating as a neutral forum for discussion and a source for technical expertise. All provinces and territories have representation in this association, confirming its reputation as a well-respected and effective body. The TAC has produced the Manual of Uniform Traffic Devices for Canada, which prescribes standards for implementing various transportation practices.

Kilometre marker signs or distance markers, as they are referred to, provide notification of the continuous distance traveled on a given highway, beginning at the point on the highway which is the most western or southern. The signs are placed along each side of the highway at two-kilometre intervals. When necessary, these standards are enhanced and signs are placed at more frequent intervals. On sections of the freeway in the greater Toronto area, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation has installed these signs at 200-metre intervals due to the high volume of traffic and the increased potential for collision. As well, on such a high-volume freeway it becomes very important to access and clear accident scenes as soon as possible to prevent extended delays and remove the blockage so as to prevent even more accidents occurring.

I view the purpose of these kilometre markers as twofold, Mr. Speaker. First, they are intended to assist motorists in measuring their progress from a fixed point. Secondly and perhaps most importantly to my constituents, they provide an easy reference to identify one's location, particularly if an accident has been caused. In terms of safety it is important. In terms of determining progress on a given route, orientating oneself is easier when one knows what distance they are from a single fixed point. The fixed point, as outlined by the TAC, is generally the western or southern beginning of the highway at the provincial boundary. Provinces such as British Columbia have implemented a modified system to satisfy their unique needs. They have only implemented the system along one section of the highway at this time, so they have not numbered it from the beginning of the south or west boundary. This modification may also be required in Alberta.

This is especially useful to tourists and motorists who may be from out of the province and not have a clear understanding of Alberta geography. It is reasonable to expect that they have an understanding of where the borders are, but they may not be sure

where certain towns and cities in the province are. Therefore, a confirmation of distance sign only gives them the distance from what is to them an imprecise point or floating target, if you will. A kilometre marker sign will inform them where they are from a specific point, a stationary point which they will already be familiar with, and it will be much more useful to them. For those that have traveled Highway 2 often, this may seem unnecessary, but put yourselves in the shoes or vehicle, as the case may be, of a motorist who does not use this road often. It is for these motorists that this will be beneficial.

I will address how these signs will contribute to the increased safety of motorists. When motorists are stopped and call for assistance for any reason, they may reference the kilometre marker sign closest to them, which will indicate exactly where they are on the highway to the dispatcher they have called. The dispatcher will then be able to send emergency or other services to the exact location without delay. This is a very precise and simple procedure, yet it eliminates many confusing and anxious moments for the motorist, dispatcher, and service provider.

Let me give you some examples of situations which have occurred in my own constituency. The Lacombe fire department in conjunction with the town of Lacombe brought this issue to my attention. They often receive directions to collision scenes from the public, giving locations such as north of Lacombe on Highway 2, somewhere between Morningside and the Lacombe overpass; southbound lane, somewhere near Juniper Lodge; on Highway 2, near the Highway 12 overpass; south on Highway 2, between Blackfalds and Petro-Canada. Considering the distances involved along Highway 2, these directions are not specific enough. On many occasions the Lacombe fire department has dispatched two units in different directions to seek out these accidents. This is not an efficient use of resources, but it is the most efficient way to reach accident scenes quickly under such circumstances.

To create even greater uncertainty, motorists who do not know the area have great difficulty relaying even the most incomplete information to someone else. Unless obvious landmarks such as a sign, interchange, or residence are close to them when they find themselves in need of assistance, the information is not specific enough to dispatch an emergency vehicle. Due to the nature of the highway as a main corridor through the province, there are many motorists who are not regular users. Often they cannot provide an adequate description of their location when required.

I consider Alberta to be a very beautiful and indeed interesting place to travel in, Mr. Speaker, and I am certain all of my colleagues do. However, if you think about your travels along Highway 2, there are not significant numbers of distinct landmarks to orientate oneself by other than in a very general way, especially none specific enough to pinpoint a precise location. When you compound this with darkness, it becomes very difficult to provide this information whether you know the area or not.

Quoting the number on the kilometre marker sign allows emergency or nonemergency services, such as tow trucks, to respond to incidents much faster. They will be sure of the location they are needed at and will not have to take a more general route to observe the range the incident may have occurred. Simply allowing emergency or nonessential services, such as tow trucks, to locate and arrive at that location as quickly as possible is an advantage to all motorists.

This is not so vital when a motorist experiences car trouble. However, it becomes extremely important when an accident involving injury occurs. The longer it takes for emergency services to arrive at a collision scene, the longer it will be before

an injured motorist will receive the necessary assistance. In some cases injuries are non life threatening, and the response time would not be a factor. However, when injuries are severe, response time is of the essence and makes a great deal of difference.

Between 1993 and 1995 twenty-five people died in collisions on Highway 2 between Calgary and Edmonton and 770 people were injured. In total 2,067 collisions occurred. It is clear that emergency services are required to access this highway on a regular basis, if not on a frequent basis. As I said earlier, many times the emergency responders in the town of Lacombe are called out. It is important to remember that although there may not have been injuries or fatalities in every collision, there were certainly emergency services called.

Every accident is treated as a serious accident requiring immediate response, and that's the way it should be. The appropriate emergency services are dispatched each and every time they are called. I will be quite clear in saying that I know that every provider of emergency services in Alberta – whether it is the police, RCMP, fire department, or an ambulance service – takes great pride in being able to offer the best response time and services possible. I believe we should provide them with the tools to do so, and this motion contributes to that end.

4:00

In this day and age there is an extensive use of mobile, cellular telephones. We are able to call anyone at any time. We are accessible, and by extension we can access anyone we need. This provides us with a certain level of confidence, security, and comfort. I believe this is a very important development in technology which I am glad we are embracing, but we must consider the effect this has on how we respond to emergency situations on our primary highways. Before the widespread use of cellular telephones, whether it was the motorist in need of assistance or a passerby, they had to travel to the nearest telephone to call for help. This was often very difficult as the telephone would sometimes be located quite a distance from the vehicle. Therefore, the precise location of the motorist could be provided much easier if we had in place kilometre markers. Motorists with cellular phones now call from the point they are stopped at, where there is not necessarily a point of reference for them to communicate to a dispatcher. This is how problems are initiated in attempting to respond to a motorist's call for assistance.

What I am proposing in this motion will affect many Albertans. Whether they live near a portion of Highway 2 or not, they will likely be traveling along this route at some point. Indeed, it is part of the main north/south trade corridor in the province and provides the easiest access to the centres of Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. This road, as I indicated earlier, is well traveled. Although the volume of traffic varies depending on the section of highway, some areas see over 47,000 vehicles every day. We can expect to see the volume of traffic along this corridor increase over time. As part of the Alberta advantage we have identified this as part of the most effective transportation system we have to bring Alberta's exports to international markets. Our responsibility does not end at providing the pavement and maintenance. We must also support motorists who use these roadways with the emergency response that Albertans expect. This is an integral part of our transportation infrastructure.

I believe the motion before us today will ensure that Albertans are safer when driving on our busiest highway. This will be beneficial not only to individual Albertans but will go far to build

on the Alberta advantage through a well-supported infrastructure. I thank the Lacombe fire department, ambulance services, and mayor and council for urging me to bring this forward. I would ask you to consider and support Motion 502.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, may we have unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?
The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

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

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's a real honour for me to introduce guests to you today both from within our province and from far, far away. First of all, from Red Deer is Glenn Fretz. Glenn is the executive director of International Needs, Canada. International Needs is in fact an international organization which meets the particular needs of national and indigenous groups and assists them in development within their own countries. With Mr. Fretz we have three individuals, two students and a school principal from a Christian school in Ghana. In this particular village this school has some 300 students who attend from a number of villages, getting educated and also receiving a hot meal every day. I would like to introduce to you the school principal. All the way from Ghana is Comfort Tachi and a 10-year-old student, Gifty Ashi – and I hope I have pronounced that correctly, Gifty – and a 12-year-old student, David Mensah. I asked both David and Gifty what their favourite subject was. They both replied: math. I could probably use a little help in my own office in that particular area. So I'd like them all, as they are, to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**
(*continued*)

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend the Member for Lacombe-Stettler on her motion. We know how many people travel Highway 2. Many people in this House travel it weekly, if not more often. I know that Highway 2, especially in the winter, has many accidents. I think it's the way the wind comes across and it becomes icy, and we have pileups and jams there. Certainly Highway 2, being part of that north/south corridor, is a good place to try this out on.

I think from the motion you indicated that every two kilometres there would be a marker. Was that the motion? It didn't matter? It was up in the air, whatever the wise government decides?

This is actually an issue that addresses all people in Alberta. I don't know who in this province hasn't traveled down Highway 2. It begs even the bigger issue of identifying where people are. I certainly know that in the county of Sturgeon the mailing address for me is still RR 1, St. Albert.

Well, when you're calling an ambulance or a fire truck or anyone and you say, "Well, you go past Uncle Joe's house, and then you turn left," that's not a very good description. In a moment of crisis people aren't thinking clearly, and they often do give that kind of description. Where I live, there have been

incidents where houses have burned to the ground waiting for the fire department to find that location.

DR. MASSEY: You've got enough relatives.

MRS. SOETAERT: I've got enough relatives. They should be out there telling them where to go, I know.

AN HON. MEMBER: Or where you are.

MRS. SOETAERT: Where I am. Lots of them tell me where to go.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, just an aside. My caucus says that if all my relatives voted Liberal, we'd be government tomorrow. So I do have to work on some of those relatives; it's obvious.

Speaking seriously to this motion, I think the identification of highway markers along Highway 2, tying in with the bigger issue of being able to identify locations anywhere in this province, would be a very good move. I don't know if the cost has been looked into. I know it's a motion, so that's the government's job and probably under the department of transportation. This could even tie in with call boxes, which I know have been talked about, along Highway 2. A lot of people have cell phones, I realize, but many people don't. If even the call boxes were tied in to this, then anyone traveling could at least get to one and phone and report the location of an accident or an incident that needs attention.

The first point that the member said was to assist motorists, and I think that's very important. We get very comfortable in our province. We know how to get almost anywhere, but this is a province that a lot of people love visiting. It's without a doubt the most beautiful province in Canada, and I think tourism is becoming a bigger and bigger industry in this province. I know it is. Highway safety ties in to that. Many of us have gone other places and said: "Well, it's a dangerous road, but it's a nice scenic route. Try it, but be careful on it." I don't want people to say that about Alberta. I want them to say, "It's a beautiful route, and it's safe." If these markers do something to help all of our visitors, our tourists, and our regular users of the road, then I will support that motion because I think it's a good move.

The second reason, the hon. member said, was easy reference for accidents. I know that Lacombe is kind of in the middle of that stretch that's being indicated, and I am glad they brought that to your attention. I think we're all aware that there are many incidents along that highway where people need to access and get help quickly, and all the cities and towns along there would appreciate that easy identification.

I commend the hon. member on this motion. I do support it for those reasons of safety, being able to identify where accidents have occurred, for the tourists and travelers coming into our province, and probably, too, for the people who use it most frequently. My friend from Lethbridge-East and my friend from Calgary-Buffalo I know drive that one several, several times and of course other members across the way, even Red Deer. I want him to be safe on that highway too. [interjections] I'm far too generous, I know. Mr. Speaker, all joking aside, I think we all want people to be safe on our highways. That's a given in this House, and if these markers being put up every two kilometres save one life, then they have served their purpose.

I think it's an excellent area. This will be an excellent trial. It's probably the busiest stretch of highway in our province, between Calgary and Edmonton. We could test that out and then

maybe look at the one from Banff to Calgary. I believe that's another one, Highway 1, that we should look at if it's successful on Highway 2.

I would say the initial cost is the biggest expense. I would hope that the minister of transportation, if this motion passes, will look at this possibly being within his budget next year along with the widening of highway 794. I just had to get that in, as everyone knows. They'll be sick of it at the end.

I do support this motion, and I'm very pleased that the Member for Lacombe-Stettler has brought it forward. Thank you.

4:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that some very important points have already been made about the usefulness of the kilometre marker signs, but I'd like to contribute further to the debate by just offering a few comments.

I'd like to provide a more detailed description of what the marker signs actually would look like. These signs are very different from our distance confirmation signs used on our Canadian highways. The marker signs are much smaller. In fact, they're only 60 centimetres high and at their widest point, 20 centimetres. The markings would in fact be reflective, just as our confirmation of distance signs currently are, to allow for visibility at night or inclement weather. Each sign will have on it only the kilometre number that it represents.

Some may argue that placing these signs at two-kilometre intervals would serve to distract passing motorists, but in determining the size and description of any sign on our roadside, the distance distraction should in fact be a consideration. The Transportation Association of Canada has considered and developed standards for these signs accordingly. These kilometre marker signs will not clutter up our highway or obstruct the view of the countryside as you're passing them.

We who drive on this road all the time must remove ourselves from our own personal position of believing that we know every twist and turn, when there are not very many of them, on Highway 2 to really understand the need for kilometre marker signs. You have to look at it from the point of view of someone who rarely travels that road.

It might surprise some of our urban colleagues to find out that a large majority of Edmontonians and Calgaryans rarely leave those cities, but in fact when they do, it's usually on a weekend and they're just enjoying driving around in the countryside or on Highway 2, especially with their campers. We also have thousands and thousands and thousands of tourists from not only the rest of our country but also from indeed around the world, and many of these people are not familiar with where a Blackfalds might be or a Lacombe or any of the smaller communities that are not readily accessible off Highway 2.

I believe the signs will increase our motorists' confidence in the expediency of assistance should they require it, whether it be nonemergency or emergency services. Some will make the argument that kilometre marker signs are really unnecessary as there are so many other motorists traveling past at any given point who can call for emergency assistance, that it would be in fact easy to pinpoint the location, also that it is easy for emergency services to locate a stranded motorist or an accident scene along a relatively straight road. Well, that's all true to a degree. It really helps if it's a sunny summer day versus, of course, the other eight months of the year, when we have the Alberta

advantage of ski season. In fact, it is less than ideal conditions that often cause these accidents. Cold weather, lack of visibility, slippery or wet roads, and darkness indeed create the conditions for accidents to occur. We can only imagine how difficult it could be for an emergency services vehicle to arrive at a specific location under those circumstances.

Just as a reminder to all of us, from downtown Edmonton to Gasoline Alley in Red Deer is 166 kilometres. There are very few communities between those two points. Of course, Ellerslie is on the highway, and Blackfalds can be seen from the highway. Ponoka can be seen from the highway, even though it's five kilometres back. Other than that, you're pretty much on your own unless you specifically remember which overpass you saw or exactly how far back that might have been when you last noticed you were driving by something.

If an accident occurs in a major centre, you can count in minutes how long it takes to get an ambulance or a paramedic to the scene and then to a trauma centre. If you are on a highway, you would be counting by the hour, more so if your location is unclear. All the Member for Lacombe-Stettler is trying to accomplish here is to aid people in distress to get the help they need and for the people who provide those services to have a fighting chance of finding them rapidly.

I ask all members to consider carefully this motion. I'm not one for wanting to spend extra dollars on wasted items, but if we could in fact urge the minister of transportation to look at this concept in the spirit in which it's made, then maybe we can find a way to achieve this goal of safety on our highways without spending as much as has been forecast and yet achieving the same purpose. I ask for your consideration on this motion.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Gee, it's been a few years since I've seen all-party support for government motions. Kind of nice. I thank the Member for Lacombe-Stettler for sponsoring this motion. It's a good one.

Speaker's Ruling Clarification

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the ND opposition, we have before us a private member's motion, not a government motion, not an opposition motion. For one who has just returned, these are no longer government motions. These are private members' public motions.

MS BARRETT: You're right. I forgot the rules. Ah, but I've been doing my research for the last four years. I've been ready for this.

Debate Continued

MS BARRETT: In supporting the motion, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to add that in states and countries with very high, dense populations, you'll find these are really quite common. In fact, say you're driving to Los Angeles. Now, there's an experience. You couldn't function without those markers. You absolutely could not. Same with the exit markers, those sorts of things.

But, you know, while Highway 2 is a good start, when you think about the issue of safety, there's another highway that you might want to keep in mind. That's the highway where there's a

lot of industrial traffic and a lot of collisions and death. I don't believe in the word "accident." There's no such thing as an accident, but there are collisions. That's the highway from Fort McMurray. The previous speaker talked about how you can go from downtown Edmonton to Gasoline Alley in Red Deer and it's 166 kilometres. Well, that's nothing compared to some of the stretches on the highway to Fort McMurray. You don't even pass by a cabin. You don't know if there's a human being within a hundred miles of you. So when it comes to safety, I would say that that highway would deserve attention next because of the nature of the traffic that's there and because of how remote it is. You don't know where you are. I mean, you can kind of guess: duh, I'm half an hour from Mariana Lake maybe. But you could be off by 20 minutes, you know. It's just such a remote area.

In any event, it is also, I think, really good for tourism. I mean, people aren't going to say: "Don't go to Alberta. They don't have highway traffic markers on Highway 2. I'm going to boycott Alberta." Obviously not. But if it facilitates ease for tourism, all the better.

I hope we get to a vote on this motion. I'll certainly be voting yes. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just take a few moments and speak to this motion and provide some additional support by highlighting what I believe to be some salient reasons why everyone should support this motion. In listening to some of the concerns here today and some of the offerings of suggestions for the hon. member and her motion, the use of kilometre marking signs and the benefit they would provide to Albertans, I think the most important thing not only to Albertans but to visitors alike – I can't help but agree with all the assessments that everyone has put forward. My colleagues have made some very important points.

We are actively trying to create an environment in this province for both individuals and industries to succeed. Most of the industries in Alberta rely heavily on our wonderful highway, and that's that wonderful Highway 2, which we call the export highway. That is a highway that we look to to do our business on. It is the access to isolated areas and a direct and efficient route to external markets which will allow industry to succeed. I believe one of the most important things that we can do today, if we're looking at this export highway – and I'm involved with the Montana/Alberta exchange program and particularly in tourism. Since Montana is looking at highway markers, it would be only proper and right to continue that direction into Alberta so that there is some consistency not only in being able to identify where you are on Highway 2, but it also will provide our visitors with the opportunity to know that we in Canada and the United States work together and work collectively to make our traveling public a little bit more comfortable.

4:20

It is our responsibility to ensure that this environment can be maintained. We will not interfere in how business is done in this province, but we have made the commitment to ensure that where we can provide an attractive and useful infrastructure for business to thrive, we will make every effort to do that.

The more traffic we have on our highways, the more emergencies we will have to deal with. Our emergency service system is excellent right now; however, we must prepare for the future.

We must ensure that given the changes in technology and the increased volumes of traffic on our highways, we can continue to provide this service. This is where our responsibility lies. I believe the goal is very clear. The best way to reach this goal is what we must decide.

The member opposite from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert had addressed the issue of motorist-aid call boxes. She mentioned this just last week in her response to some of the estimates. She referred to this program, which was initiated last year and has since been considered by the Department of Transportation and Utilities. The minister indicated that his department was pursuing this program and would likely be implementing it shortly and that he would be doing it in partnership with the private sector. The minister also made reference to the motion we are debating today, in that some aspects of the kilometre marking signs could be integrated into the call box program. I am glad to hear that this is certainly the responsibility of our government, to determine the most effective way to meet those objectives. This is the purpose of all the debate in this House.

To the end of providing the best possible solution, I will outline what I see as the installation of kilometre marking signs and how they can be integrated with a call box program. Although each program is designed to give motorists increased security on the highway, each program uses a different approach. Motorist-aid call boxes under the proposal by the minister are cellular telephones located along the highways for the use of motorists who require emergency or nonemergency services. They are to be monitored by the private company who is providing both the phones and the service at no cost to taxpayers. When a motorist uses these phones, they will be in contact with the monitoring service, who will in turn call emergency services or nonemergency services, such as a tow truck, who will come to the aid of that motorist.

Alternately, kilometre marking signs are designed to give motorists their location by relying on the motorist to find a means to communicate this information when required. It has been mentioned that the widespread use of personal cellular telephones provides this means of communication. Nevertheless, not every motorist who is stranded will have a cellular phone, and this is when call boxes will be of good use.

Two of the main reasons for the installation of kilometre marking signs are not satisfied through call boxes. Motorists unfamiliar with the area are able to orientate themselves when they see kilometre marking signs, and motorists with private cellular telephones are able to reference their location when using their own cellular telephone. This will certainly be the case when the weather is inclement and security becomes a more relevant issue. They may be addressed by providing more obvious signage on each call box so that motorists do not have to actually use the telephone to be made aware of their locations. This signage should, however, be consistent with the standards developed for kilometre marking signs. To identify a call box with no relation to the continuous position of the box along the highway would not satisfy the conditions which kilometre marking signs are developed for.

I believe one of the most important considerations must be the location of the call boxes. It was determined earlier in this debate that the standard interval for placing kilometre markings should be every two kilometres. The expectation is that the call boxes would be placed every four kilometres at the most. To provide the information required to motorists on a frequent enough basis is a very important and integral part of the success of the kilo-

metre marking program. Call boxes do not, as they are presently being considered, allow for this.

I would like to touch on tourism for one moment and the potential that we have in this province, particularly as it applies to some technology. As I live in a truly breathtaking section of Alberta, tourism is a very important part of the economy for the citizens of Livingstone-Macleod. If we can make these tourists more comfortable when traveling our highways, I believe that this would have some very positive results. There is nothing that will ruin a holiday more quickly than experiencing car trouble en route. We should hope that they only experience it in your beautiful constituency, Mr. Speaker, so they can whip into some of your towns that are just off Highway 2.

Kilometre marking signs would allow these tourists to access services more quickly and save them the trouble of trying to provide an accurate description of their location. Out-of-province tourists would find these markers just as useful as many of us do when we're traveling an unfamiliar area.

One other area that I happen to know a fair amount about is the use of computers in cars, with maps showing the highway systems in an area and using a little cursor to show what highway you're on. These computer programs now are coming out with the kilometre identification marks on them, so this initiative would be consistent with the technology that is presently coming out of the United States.

I am concerned, though, that the existence of this call box program may be considered a reason not to accept the motion that we are debating today. This should not be the case however. I have outlined to you the conditions satisfied through the kilometre marking sign program which are genuinely important. I do not believe the fact that the Department of Transportation and Utilities is considering implementing the motorist-aid call box should preclude the success of this motion. In fact, it should create even greater reason and support for it. To pass the motion will indicate the support of this Assembly for consideration of kilometre marking signs, which although similar to the motorist-aid call boxes are not identical.

There can be an integration of these two programs, and I urge you all to support this motion so that the objectives of the kilometre marking sign program are not lost in the implementation of the motorist-aid call box program. This would have outstanding benefits, as I said earlier, for not only the motoring public and the tourists that go through our province but also the business sector that takes our goods, our services, and our people in and out of the United States, particularly when we look at the NAFTA program and the amount of exports that continue to go into the United States. Not only that; we look at some of the product that continues to come back into Alberta through the border crossing at Coutts.

By the way, it would be beneficial at this point in time to mention the new border crossing station, the integrated border crossing at Coutts. With the use of that facility we could perpetuate the idea of kilometre marking signs, and the people that are involved at those border crossings could make sure that people are on their right way on Highway 2.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm reluctant to interrupt the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded for the day.

head: **Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

4:30

Mr. Shariff moved:

That an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To His Honour the Honourable H.A. "Bud" Olson, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. Broda]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: I'm done, sir.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to stand and speak on some of the issues that were raised in the Speech from the Throne and to talk about the concerns that were expressed by the residents of Lethbridge-East during the recent election in terms of what they expected and what they were hoping for in terms of the government mandate in the coming period.

What I did after the election was to indicate to the other candidates who were running that if they would share with me some of the concerns they had heard from the residents of Lethbridge-East while they were door-knocking, while they were attending meetings, while they were attending forums, I would be sure to incorporate their ideas and their concerns. It was quite revealing in the sense that from the two candidates that did respond to my request – the third chose not to – the results were very similar in terms of what each of them was hearing at the door, so it wasn't a matter of the issue being portrayed in the context of a party perspective. When you went to the door, they were all talking basically about the same kinds of issues.

It's interesting in the sense that everybody seemed to feel that health care was the issue of the election, yet in Lethbridge-East education was the issue of the election in our constituency. We had a very fortunate situation, I think, in the health care field, because the regional health authority managed to make their changes to adjust to the new format with probably as small an upheaval in the provision of health care services as any regional health authority in the province. So we actually had only minor concerns connected with health care.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

In that area the only one that really was common, more than just occasionally, was the issue of the establishment or the relocation of seniors into long-term care and the process of having to move out to surrounding communities instead of being able to stay in Lethbridge. Some of them that were in surrounding communities, because of the first-in-line priority, would even be shipped into Lethbridge when the family would still be in the rural community. These are the kinds of things that we need to get some adjustment in. It would almost be appropriate in that kind of a situation to allow for almost a bed swap kind of thing, in the sense that if somebody was coming out from Milk River or from Pincher Creek, they could swap with someone who was in

Lethbridge who wanted to be in Pincher Creek or Milk River or some of the other smaller communities. What we need to do is, you know, encourage the regional authority to look at those kinds of more flexible adjustment patterns to meet the needs of the families. Madam Speaker, I think they're really doing that now; they've changed some of their processes. So from the health care perspective, it wasn't an issue, really, that the people in Lethbridge-East wanted to address.

Education, on the other hand, was talked about quite regularly. We had 11 different forums in our campaign program, four of them specifically focused on education. Questions came up, and they dealt with class size, classrooms, ability of the teacher to teach, the ability of the electronic support that's being put in place to support teaching. Why were dollars being spent on computers? How was this going to be supported? How accessible were they going to be for their children? These are the kinds of questions that are going to have to be addressed by the local school boards and Alberta Education as they deal with the role of technology in education, and we need to really critically look at how we're going to incorporate technologies into the classroom.

The other issue that really came up in the education area was special-needs funding and how that has affected the ability of teachers, schools, and school boards to maintain their focus of the integration of special-needs students right into the classrooms. Some of the cutbacks were requiring the support for special-needs children to be adjusted, to be changed to the point where they weren't getting the full experience of the classroom that they had been in previous teaching scenarios. So there was a real concern there.

A number of teaching aides that were supporting the special-needs students had to be dismissed or changed as the cutbacks came into place. So what we have to do is look at the idea of how to deal with really getting the funding there to support the needs of a student who is classed as a special need. This is at both ends of the spectrum, both for the learning disadvantaged and the exceptional student, the skilled student. Some of these were being channeled into the regular classroom, not being given the support they needed and the challenge they needed to maintain their interest in the school system. So those were basically the kinds of concerns that came up on a very regular basis.

There were also some concerns addressed in terms of the level of teacher funding: whether or not the 5 percent was going to come back to them, how this was going to be incorporated into the negotiations and into the budget. You know, we're waiting now, looking at the budgets that have been allocated by the department to see how that's going to work out through the negotiation process with the teachers' associations in each of those areas.

One of the other areas that came up and really was a big issue in Lethbridge-East was the role that children's services regionalization is playing. Lethbridge has really had a round of consultations, a lot of input by parents, by individuals involved in the provision of services for children. They're now sitting there, looking at what's going to happen to this. Their hope is that this kind of effort they've put in over the last two or three years will result in a really good program coming out that will provide them with an indication of the role that the community's going to play. I think one of the biggest disappointments that could happen to the constituency would be some kind of a shelving of those reports and not carrying through now with recognizing the efforts they've put into providing input to the possible localization and regionalization of children's services.

One of the concerns that came up with respect to that was the concern over how far the localization or the privatization might go in terms of the protection services for children. There were a lot of comments made at a number of the forums and in private presentations that questioned whether or not it would be appropriate to have the protection service part of children's services done at a local level or done at a privatized level. There was a concern of how a family would perceive a local or a privatized group – there was even more concern toward the privatized – coming in and saying: we have a reason to take your child from your home. There was a lot of concern in Lethbridge. They felt that this should be done and retained at the provincial level. It's the degree of authority that comes out at that level that allows for the acceptance of that kind of judgment. So they were concerned about that, and they would like to see that addressed.

One of the other issues that came up quite frequently was the issue of employment, of jobs. What do we do with the individuals who are in low-paid positions or unemployed or on social services? How do we make sure that they're going to participate fully in the economic boom we're feeling right now in terms of the opportunity to put themselves in a better position?

The main concern here is a lot of issues in terms of the trades. I don't think Lethbridge is much different than many of the other communities in Alberta, where a lot of the individuals that are involved in the trades fields are approaching the thinking-about-retiring age. They're getting into the 50 to 65 year category, and the employers – the construction firms, the building trades, the people in the maintenance trades – are starting to look and say: gee, where are the young people coming from that are going to be supporting this? They'd like to see some efforts put into promoting and expanding the ability of the education system to encourage people into the trade areas. This is going to be especially critical for all of Alberta as we look at the construction boom that might come with expansion in the Fort McMurray oil sand projects, with the new projects that are going on in the petrochemical industry in the Red Deer area. These kinds of things are being spread out over the province now, and we're having to look at how we can get people that are trained to participate in both the building and the maintenance trades that are necessary for that.

4:40

The other issue that came up in terms of employment was some concerns about the definition of deskilling in terms of whether or not they were going to be recognized in terms of the regulations and the definitions. I think we're seeing that debate going on right now between the LPNs and the RNs, but this was still an issue in a number of fields, not just in the health care field, as we talked to people at the door.

One of the other issues that came up that kind of ties both my first and third concerns together was a lot of concern about the advanced education area and the cost that's having to be borne now by students, the access that they have to education facilities, and also how they go about making sure before they start that they have a feel for what kind of employment opportunity there is after they graduate.

We need to start addressing what constitutes a fair cost for students in terms of advanced education. What should be the public share of that cost? We have a number of the industrial sectors that come to the government and say: there's a sharing of benefits relatively on a whatever proportionate basis, so we would like you to help in that share in terms of support from the public in developing an industry. Yet we're seeming now to be pushing more and more of the cost of education onto the student, when the

very direct result that we get back from those education dollars we spend as a public is a citizen who goes out, earns higher wages, pays more taxes, and it doesn't take very long, in essence, to get our share of that cost back. We get our share back in terms of the taxes paid by those students graduating out of university or college much quicker than they can pay off the loan they had to take to pay their share. So, you know, we've got to balance this a little bit.

We heard the minister today in question period mention that they've moved now to a 30 percent ceiling based on net operating costs. Well, what we've got is the problem that those net operating costs aren't defined equally among the different institutions. We then end up with some students, based on the net operating cost of their institution, paying a higher proportion or a higher absolute dollar value in terms of tuition than someone at a different institution that has a different operating cost structure. I'd challenge the minister to start looking at how they could bring the kind of balance into the education system so that when a student is out there, they're going to be looking at dealing with a cost of their education that's both reflective of a comparable net operating cost and so that we as a public are not overburdening those students to the extent that in a matter of a few years we've got back our share of the costs through the higher taxes they're paying when they're still taking two or three or four times longer trying to pay off their loan and, as well, live in a comfortable way as members of society. So there's a real balance that has to be put in place there.

One of the other things that a number of the groups asked for at the education forums was whether or not the government would find it possible to be able to provide some guidance in terms of growth sectors four, five, six years into the future so that a person going into a two-year or a four-year education program could feel: "If I take this study program, there's a good chance that's going to be an area where I'll be able to get employment in four years, when I'm finished. Or if I take this other one - it's a toss-up. I'm putting my hat in the ring and I'm going to really take a gamble because everybody's telling us that there may not be as much employment in that area at the conclusion of my study." We don't want to get to a point where we're channeling people into education, but we also have to get to a position where we as a public are providing good signals to the individuals entering into the education system so that we can get a balance in terms of how their expectations match with reality when they're finished.

In conclusion, I just wanted to mention a couple of other brief things that did come up which dealt with basically the idea that the people of Lethbridge-East were quite excited that Alberta was now operating essentially in a balanced budget situation. They were quite encouraged that some of the issues had been addressed that they saw as a real problem in the '93 election, and they wanted to make sure that that kind of fiscal accountability continued. In terms of most of the conversations I had that dealt with how do we deal with budget surpluses, budget projections, any extra dollars, the general consensus when we talked about it at the doors or at the forums was that right now this should still be used to pay off the debt. We as a group of citizens that have gotten the benefits from the past expenditures of governments should be paying our share now while we're still at an income-earning age or position rather than, you know, let's take a tax break now, and then our children or our grandchildren can pay for it later. So they really wanted us to hold the line on paying down the debt, and this was an issue that came out quite regularly.

Madam Speaker, I guess in terms of what I'd committed to both

the other candidates that ran in the election with me and to the members of the community that I spoke with during the election, these are really the issues they wanted to see brought up and addressed and kind of registered as the areas where they have concerns in the operation of the province and the direction we'd be going. So with those few comments in the areas of education, children's services, jobs, and advanced education, I'll take my seat and consider that we're going to start the session that way.

4:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the representative for Calgary-Lougheed it is truly a privilege and a pleasure for me to stand before you and my colleagues here in the Assembly today to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor for his reading of the Speech from the Throne. The mandate of this government, to ensure that all Albertans "continue to benefit from growth [and] prosperity" and to have access to "quality, responsive, and affordable public services," is one that my constituents and I support.

In fact, Madam Speaker, it was on this mandate that the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed chose me to be their representative in this Assembly, and on this occasion I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed for granting me this great honour. It is my belief, of course, that it is the role of Members of the Legislative Assembly to first and foremost serve the people they represent. To that end I will facilitate the democratic process in my constituency by remaining accessible to my constituents. I will listen to their needs and concerns, and I will be their voice in this Assembly. I will serve my constituents with pride, integrity, and commitment, and I will endeavour to fulfill all of their expectations.

As I was door-knocking and visiting with constituents during the election campaign, I was repeatedly told that our government must remain on the path of fiscal responsibility. I concur. As we head into the 21st century, we must ensure that the province's spending remains under control. Madam Speaker, my constituents are pleased with this government's record. We now have legislated balanced budgets, a streamlined government, and a rapidly diminishing debt. These are the building blocks of a strong economy and will serve to facilitate economic growth and job creation for all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, I stand here today having been given a great honour and an exciting opportunity to represent the unique constituency of Calgary-Lougheed, which is a solid constituency and which has both urban and rural components. This is also an exciting time to represent the city of Calgary itself. Calgary's economy is booming. In fact, it has outperformed the Canadian economy every year since 1990. Calgary has the lowest unemployment rate of any major centre in Canada at 6.5 percent. The national rate is 9.7 percent. Businesses from across the nation and abroad anxious to benefit from the Alberta advantage are steadily relocating their head offices to Calgary. Calgary is now second only to Toronto as a corporate head office centre. Calgary is a vibrant and dynamic city, the success of which benefits not only the people of Calgary-Lougheed and other Calgarians but all Albertans.

For these past several years - 11, I believe it has been - the people of Calgary-Lougheed have had excellent representation, representation from an admirable man of great ability who always

had time for people and who always stood up for what he believed was right. Many of my colleagues know him as a man of impeccable integrity and an incredibly hard worker. All Albertans know him as a man who put our fiscal house in order, helped steer Alberta toward a better and brighter future, and made Alberta once again the envy of the nation. Of course, I am speaking of Mr. Jim Dinning, the man who doesn't blink.

If I may, Madam Speaker, I would like to say a few words about Jim, as I have a tremendous amount of respect for him and I owe him a great deal of gratitude. Jim Dinning is the primary reason I am standing in this House today. Jim was the one who captured my imagination, who inspired me, who got me truly interested in public service. You see, I first moved into Jim's constituency, which was then called Calgary-Shaw, shortly after our esteemed Premier began leading Alberta toward a new future full of promise. I had barely started unpacking when Jim asked me to join his constituency association. At the time I thought to myself: here's a man who is so incredibly busy serving his constituents and the people of Alberta, yet he still has time to personally encourage people to get involved and to be contributing members of the Conservative team. Frankly, I was very pleased to sign up, simply because I believed in the work that Jim was doing and the direction that the Premier was taking Alberta. How could anyone not want to be part of anything as important as building Alberta's future and putting Alberta in its rightful place, leading the nation?

Shortly after joining the Calgary-Shaw constituency association, the 1993 election was called. Jim was again re-elected, this time as our representative for the new constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. I was proud to be part of the election team at that time, in large part because of Jim.

I've always known Jim to be a man that anyone could get along with, a man who had a humorous anecdote or a saying of the great Yogi Berra and who always had a smile. I also know what a hard worker he is, the hours he would put in, the abundance of creative energy that he has, and the ability he has to inspire others to greatness. It is that leadership that I have come to know and admire, and it is that leadership that the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed have come to expect. It is that leadership that inspired me. In fact, Madam Speaker, it is Jim Dinning who encouraged me to run for the Progressive Conservative nomination in Calgary-Lougheed last year when he decided not to run for office again. I think many of us would agree that an honour like that is hard to decline.

Madam Speaker, I know that Jim Dinning will be missed in this House. He is a man of unbelievable energy, remarkable talents, and one of the best MLAs you could ever hope to have. Jim, if you're listening, you're the best. On behalf of the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed, thank you for everything. And Stockwell, you're great too.

AN HON. MEMBER: What about Jon?

MS GRAHAM: He's not the Provincial Treasurer at the moment.

Madam Speaker, as I listened to the throne speech, I couldn't help but hear echoes of Jim Dinning when the Lieutenant Governor told us that fiscal responsibility remains a priority and that this government's agenda was aimed squarely at "growth, prosperity, and jobs and quality, responsive, and affordable public services." This is what Premier Klein promised during the election, and this is what Premier Klein and this government will do.

I've always believed that following through on a promise and keeping your word is of utmost importance. In the political realm it is critical not only to maintain your own integrity but also the integrity of the entire democratic and political process. Keeping his word is what Premier Klein has done. That is why the other members of the government caucus and I are here now with nine more members than before the election. In fact, Premier Klein is a large part of the reason I am here today as well. I'm here today because, like Jim Dinning, the Premier has inspired me to get involved, to contribute to the growth of Alberta, and to run for public office. I've always believed that a true leader is not necessarily someone who does great things; it is someone who inspires others to do great things. Premier Klein has inspired me and countless other Albertans in this regard, and for that I thank him.

5:00

I also commend Premier Klein for his vision and for his dedication to improving the quality of life for all Albertans. I believe that his greatest strength is his ability to sense what Albertans want, to listen, and to take action. Madam Speaker, his strength and courageous leadership along with the determination of a team of dedicated representatives have secured a brighter future for this province. It is truly an honour to represent the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed on this dynamic team that will lead the province into the next century.

Madam Speaker, with the direction laid out in the throne speech, today I make this pledge. I will diligently work for the residents of Calgary-Lougheed and all Albertans and urge the government to stay the course of fiscal responsibility while ensuring that essential public services are always available to those who truly need them. Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to represent the unique constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. It was created in 1993, as I mentioned, as a result of an electoral boundary revision. My constituency is located in the southwest corner of Calgary. It is bordered on the east by the constituency of Calgary-Fish Creek, on the north by the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore, and on the west by the constituency of Banff-Cochrane. To the south of the constituency lie Calgary-Shaw and the Highwood constituency. The communities of Cedarbrae, Woodbine, Woodlands, and Canyon Meadows are served by this constituency. The communities of Woodbine and Woodlands are the younger communities, and the communities of Canyon Meadows and Cedarbrae are more established communities.

I am also a rural MLA with a number of acreages and farms located in the southern corner of my constituency south of Fish Creek park, which extends to Highway 22, which is near Spruce Meadows, which I'm sure many of you have heard about. Madam Speaker, clearly these communities, including my rural component, have different needs and concerns, and I will diligently represent each accurately and fairly to the best of my ability.

Madam Speaker, I am a third-generation Albertan with rural roots myself. I was raised on a farm near Joffre, which is located just east of Red Deer. I grew up in this community, where everyone knew their neighbours and had a keen sense of community values. These values became important to me and are part of who I am, I should hope, and I was very glad when I found these same values when I moved into my constituency of Calgary-Lougheed.

Madam Speaker, Fish Creek park is probably my constituency's most distinguishable feature. Calgaryans are very proud of this scenic oasis in the middle of the city. I am fortunate to live right

on the edge of Fish Creek park, and every morning I awake to a spectacular view of virtually untouched wilderness outside my window. For this I am very thankful.

During the election campaign, the people of Calgary-Lougheed raised with me a number of issues and concerns, and overwhelmingly my constituents told me that access to quality services, including education and health care, were top priorities.

My constituents and all Albertans value quality education in our province. I was very pleased and proud to hear in the Speech from the Throne that Alberta students are doing well when compared to other students around the globe. Madam Speaker, while students are receiving quality education today, we must continue to monitor the changing needs of the marketplace to ensure that educational programs continue to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in the future. In addition, parents, communities, teachers, and students must work in partnership to ensure that students have access to the necessary information and skills which will allow them to lead productive and independent lives.

Madam Speaker, access to quality and responsive health services also remains a priority for my constituents. Albertans want to know that the health care system will be there when they need it and that they will receive quality services. However, a key area that needs to be addressed, in my opinion, is the sustainability of the system. We all know that not only is our population growing, but it is also getting older. Services such as long-term care will soon be in greater demand. I am committed to working with this government to address current pressure points in the system, to establish an affordable system that will be sustainable and responsive to the future needs of Albertans.

Madam Speaker, the Speech from the Throne reaffirmed that our government is committed to keeping our communities safe and reducing serious and violent crimes. I know that the residents of Calgary-Lougheed will be pleased to hear this, and I look forward to working with our government and the Minister of Justice to investigate and implement strategies aimed at keeping Albertans safe.

When I listened to the throne speech, I was pleased to see the direction that this government will be taking. It is a direction that will allow Albertans to achieve their fullest potential and will help to build upon the foundation Alberta needs to ensure continued success in the 21st century, and I am pleased to be part of that continued success.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my constituents in Calgary-Lougheed for bestowing upon me the great honour of representing them in this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It looks good on you, Madam Speaker.

It is my pleasure to respond to the throne speech, and it is also my continuing pleasure to represent the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora. The election fight was fierce in the streets of that constituency, and we had plenty of opportunities to explore many issues during that particular campaign.

One of the issues that came up more than once: I guess you could generalize it and say that it was a concern about democratic freedoms. It was a concern about the future of our parliamentary process. People would ask me about what would happen if there

were a one-sided majority in this House or in other Chambers across this country.

People were reacting as well, Madam Speaker, to one of the themes of the campaign that was coming from one of the unsuccessful candidates in my constituency. That theme was one of voting for a particular party because the expectation was that that party would be in power and that people would somehow be punished or diminished if they didn't vote for that party. Of course, the contrary argument was often raised that perhaps the best reason not to vote for that party would be to preserve democratic freedom. No constituent in this province should be made to feel diminished or that somehow their vote is less important because they choose to vote for a party other than the governing party.

This theme about the concern for democracy came up in other ways as well. It came up in terms of questions that people would raise in relation to access to government-held information. Certainly we've seen subsequent to the election a couple of incidents that have concerned myself and certainly give life to those issues raised by my constituents. My constituents are very concerned, for example, that we didn't learn publicly about the government walking away from the Millar Western obligations until after the election. We didn't learn publicly about the true intent of this government, which was to abandon CKUA radio, until after the election.

5:10

There was certainly a concern raised about secrecy, Madam Speaker: secrecy and special deals. I guess an example of that would have been the arrangement that was made with Alberta's physicians, that the Premier wanted to keep sort of quiet. In fact, he had suggested that maybe it wouldn't be up to him to talk about it, and I think he said to the media at the time that the AMA could sort of take care of that. My constituents asked me: since when was it a policy of the government to allow any special-interest organization, even as honourable a one as the AMA, to be a spokesperson for the government? My constituents are concerned about that.

My constituents asked me questions regarding the ability of a government to stay in power because of fear and intimidation. They asked me questions about the credibility of a government that doesn't always say and do the same thing. In fact, often they would point to many examples of a government that would say one thing and then do something completely different. Madam Speaker, those concerns as well appear to be very well founded. In fact, we've already seen how those concerns about the democratic process and about the . . . [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the floor. Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Perhaps the Minister of Energy is just having a bad day, and he'll stop muttering and sputtering and maybe he'll take to his feet . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, carry on with debate.

MR. SAPERS: My comments were addressed to you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to thank you for pointing out to the Minister of Energy that his actions continue to be inappropriate, and I appreciate that.

The concerns raised by my constituents about the future of democracy in this province again appear to be well founded. It

didn't take very long before we saw that this government was in fact going to use its majority as a way of keeping secrets, as a way of doing things behind closed doors, and in fact as a way of shutting out public debate. It didn't take very long at all before we saw an attack on free votes in this Assembly. It didn't take very long before we heard the government talk about killing the fall sitting, as though if the government had no particular agenda to bring forward, that would mean that the people of Alberta no longer had a need to hold their government accountable, a terrible confusion in terms of the roles and responsibilities, Madam Speaker. It seems to me that we are really responsible to the public and not the other way around. The way that we of course can achieve that is by being here in this place when we need to be, to hold the government to account for what it does and what it doesn't do.

Another way that we've seen democracy and openness and accountability threatened has been in the way in which budget debates are once again proceeding. There was nothing on that in the throne speech. There was no hint in the throne speech that there would be a silencing of debate on the budget. Yet that's exactly what happened, and those fears that my constituents expressed once more began to ring true. In fact, this government wasn't content with simply limiting the amount of time for debate. They even had to go further, and they had to invoke closure. How long did it take? I think it's a record. I think it's a record, Madam Speaker, that we actually had a closure motion within the first week of the proceedings in the Assembly. It's quick off the draw for this government, and this of course is a government that has used . . . [interjection]

You don't want to say anything about exhibits; do you, Madam Speaker? I know that the Member for Dunvegan didn't mean to violate that rule. Thank you.

This government has used closure more than perhaps any other government in Canada and has used closure more in the last three or four years than most parliaments in this country have used closure in their entire history.

MR. DAY: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: May I have a citation? Provincial Treasurer.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MR. DAY: Would the member entertain a brief question, Madam Speaker?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Will the member entertain a question?

MR. SAPERS: No. This is response to the throne speech, and the Treasurer has ample opportunity to chat in the hallways if he has something important to say. [interjections] It seems that shaking the tree has made them all sort of wake up, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. It's nice to know that they're paying attention, and . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: I'm still sleeping.

MR. SAPERS: Oh. The Government House Leader is still sleeping. I won't disturb his slumber, Madam Speaker.

DR. WEST: Oh, hey. That's with reference to another member.

MR. SAPERS: I hear the Minister of Energy still making the odd noise.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, we are debating the throne speech, and I would ask that you stick to the throne speech, what's contained in the throne speech.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I am trying, and I am trying to assist you in regaining control of this front bench, which has gone crazy.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: The issue is, of course, response to the Speech from the Throne, and if I'm permitted to continue, Madam Speaker . . . [interjection] Yes. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The use of closure, which has been unprecedented in this Chamber, again wasn't hinted at in the throne speech. We didn't hear a message from the Lieutenant Governor on behalf of the government saying: "We intend to shut down debate. We intend to limit the democratic process. We intend to use closure more than anybody else. We intend to make sure that opposition questions can't be heard. We intend to make sure that we do our business by order in council." None of those things were in the throne speech, and it's a shame that they weren't because of course that is exactly what this government has set out to do.

In terms of this government being open and accountable, it sure would have been nice if that throne speech had reflected their true agenda, because, of course, it didn't. They wouldn't dare tell the people of this province those things, because they didn't want that message to get out. Instead, what they do is come forward with an agenda that looks like it's an agenda of openness. It looks like it's an agenda of accountability. It even goes so far as to borrow from the throne speech and then introduce Bill 1, the Premier's first Bill, the second time that this has happened, where this Premier with a new government has introduced Bill 1, being a freedom of information Bill.

The first time was a Bill that came to this Chamber after there had been an all-party committee, an unprecedented committee in terms of its co-operation and its insight and its ability to plug right into where the people of Alberta were at regarding freedom of information and privacy. This government made a commitment to implementing that committee's report, but then the government couldn't quite bring itself to actually bring in a Bill that reflected that committee.

So then we can fast-forward to this throne speech and again a commitment to freedom of information in Bill 1. Again, it's a Bill to do with freedom of information, and it's a Bill that calls itself the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, and if you didn't read it past there, you'd think this government really was dealing with freedom of information. You'd think this government really was dealing with access to the records of public institutions. But, au contraire, that's not what they did at all. It's another slogan Bill, because when you read the Bill - it's pretty thin - what does it do? It suppresses information. It takes a body that receives almost \$9 million of public funding out of the purview of the Act. It exempts private colleges from the Act, and it says that they don't have to comply.

Now, the government doesn't need to do this by legislation, so you have to ask yourself the question: why? Why are they doing this, and why weren't we told in the throne speech: "Yeah, we're going to decimate our own freedom of information legislation.

We're going to piece it out. We're going to cut out pieces. We're going to carve out groups that we want to have subject to the Act, and we're going to have some other pieces that we don't." The government didn't say that in the throne speech, but they should have because that's exactly what Bill 1 did. So now we have this situation . . .

DR. WEST: Where were you when Gingras went out on a birthday pass? The John Howard Society wants you.

MR. SAPERS: Now I hear the hon. Minister of Energy talking about the John Howard Society, an organization which is a model of its type in the world. It's an organization that his government has supported ever since the Progressive Conservatives have been in government in this province and for 30 years before that. It's an organization which he, when he was the solicitor general, provided millions of dollars of funding to. Deputy ministers in this government have served on the board of directors of this organization. It's an organization that's funded by the United Way in every municipality that it operates in in this province. It's an organization that involves thousands of volunteers. It involves hundreds of employees, provides tens of thousands of hours of service for Albertans.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, you are talking about something that was an interjection from this side of the House. I would ask that we consider debate on Speech from the Throne, and I would ask this side of the House to please keep it down. It is nearing 5:30. Let's let this hon. member carry on with the debate on Speech from the Throne.

Thank you.

5:20

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker, and you're absolutely right. I can tell you where I was. I was working for peace and justice in my community. What were you doing? Madam Speaker, you're absolutely right. I was taken in in my debate by all the loud and raucous interjections from across the floor, and I strayed from the throne speech, but I had to come to the defence of this United Way organization, which provides such quality service to thousands of Albertans and their families year after year after year. I know it's the position of this government to support it. It was wrong of me to do that and I strayed. I'm sorry.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Now, getting back to response to the Speech from the Throne and this government's saying one thing and doing something completely different, it is an opportunity, I suppose, for me as the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora to go back to my constituents and explain to them that that's what governments do once they've been in power for such a terribly long time, that that's how governments behave. They can behave with that kind of arrogance and disregard for the process simply because they can, simply because they think they have a right to do it.

It's an opportunity for me to go back to my constituents and say: "You're right. That throne speech didn't really give us a hint towards what the real agenda was, because this government figures they can just say anything and not have to really live up to it." In fact, one of my constituents said to me after hearing the

throne speech: "Boy, you know what? That throne speech was bang on." I said: what do you mean by that? He said: well, you know, this government ran on no promises, and that throne speech certainly delivered. That was a constituent who I think has tremendous insight into this government and their agenda for the next number of years for this province. No promises. No agenda. "We'll just do as we please. We'll do it in secret as much as we can. We'll do it behind closed doors as much as we can. We'll do it by order in council as much as we can, and we'll do it with slogans as much as we can. But we're certainly not going to do it in public. We're certainly not going to talk about our agenda openly, and we're going to try to give the impression all the while that we're being open and accountable." That is saying one thing, Madam Speaker, and doing something entirely different.

It really isn't good enough for the people of this province. It certainly isn't good enough for the people of my constituency and, I daresay, for the people of most of Edmonton, where they made that choice very, very clear. Our job is to ensure that this government does not damage the people of this province, does not damage the democratic ideal, to which we all aspire, and does not by action or inaction bring further disrespect to the parliamentary process in this province.

We in this opposition caucus will do our utmost to ensure that that's exactly what we do and that this government will be as accountable as we can possibly make them, accountable in every way, inside this Chamber and out. That's why we'll be continuing to fight for free votes. That's why this Official Opposition will continue to fight for a fall sitting. That's why this opposition will continue to deal with the budget debate, in which we are insisting on as much time to question the government and to make them account for the expenditure of billions and billions of tax dollars. That's why we will be watching every day with vigilance to ensure that those ideals which were mentioned in the throne speech are actualized by the actions of this government.

It has truly been a pleasure for me to participate in the debate in reply to the Speech from the Throne, and I do note that once again the front bench is getting anxious. It could be because of the hour and blood-sugar levels being what they are prior to dinner.

I would now move that we adjourn debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

MR. HAVELOCK: Madam Speaker, I move that we call it 5:30 and that the Assembly adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening, when we will reconvene in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion as moved by the hon. Government House Leader.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]