

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 1, 1997**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 97/05/01

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray.

Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker and members of the Assembly, I am very pleased to introduce to you today His Excellency Zha Peixin, the ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Canada. His Excellency was appointed to this post in March, and we are very pleased that he has chosen to visit Alberta so soon after his appointment. We will look forward to working closely with him in the coming years.

Alberta enjoys a very long history of relations with the People's Republic of China, beginning with wheat sales back in the 1960s. Today we enjoy a \$1 billion two-way business relationship. This includes energy, and in this regard I was privileged to visit China in my previous portfolio in 1995. Overall, China is Alberta's third largest trading partner.

Albertans also take pride in our 16-year sister-province relationship with Heilongjiang. Adding to the strength of our relations with China is a large community of Canadians of Chinese ancestry. This community continues to play a large part in Alberta's prosperity and success, Mr. Speaker.

We are honoured to welcome His Excellency the ambassador to our province, and I would now ask His Excellency to rise in the gallery and receive the recognition and warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a familiar face and visitor from Russia Mr. Dennis Anderson.

Mr. Anderson, who is seated in your gallery this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, was a member of this Assembly representing the constituency of Calgary-Currie from 1979 to 1993. From 1986 to 1992 he served in several ministries: first as the Minister of Culture, then as the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and finally as Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Mr. Anderson is currently living in Russia and working with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs as a consultant on local governmental political parties and parliaments.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask Mr. Anderson to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition signed by 243 residents of Edmonton and area regarding VLTs.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted this afternoon to table copies of a report from Citizenship 2000. This was a forum in October of 1996 dealing with the challenges and opportunities confronting recent immigrants.

Thanks very much.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling today five copies of a letter of congratulations that I've sent to the Lethbridge Hurricanes hockey club. As most of the members of this Assembly will know already, the Lethbridge Hurricanes swept in four games a series with the Seattle Thunderbirds and now, of course, are the Western Hockey League champions and will be representing not only our fair city of Lethbridge but also Alberta, western Canada, and western United States in the Memorial Cup in Hull, Quebec, on May 10.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, a number of tablings today to comply with Legislative Assembly practice and legislation related to tabling documents within 15 days of the Assembly being called in. First: the Alberta Treasury's business plan for 1997-2000 with supplementary information. Copies are available in my office.

Number two: public accounts, volumes 2, 3, and 4, which were released publicly on the 25th of September, 1996, and now are being tabled in the Assembly as required by section 77 of the Financial Administration Act.

Number three: report of selected payments to Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for year ended March 31, '96. These also were released on September 25, 1996 – and widely reported on, I might add – as required by section 43(4) of the Legislative Assembly Act.

Number four: annual report of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for the year ended March 31, 1996, again released on September 25, '96, and copies of the second and third quarter reports released in November '96 and February '97 respectively for the general revenue fund and the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Gus Barron, the president of the Federation of Calgary Communities. Gus was also very involved in my campaign and a strong supporter. I would like to ask him to rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, I'd like introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 29 students from Colchester school. They are accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Fran Turner and Mrs. Linda Oslanski. Would they rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you one of my constituents from Camrose Mr. Daryl Olson. Mr. Olson is sitting in the members' gallery, and I'd like him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and all members of the Assembly Mr. Bill Daly. Mr. Daly is a well-known seniors' advocate. He is a contributor to several publications that specialize in seniors' issues. He does outstanding analysis of the financial implications of government policy on the lives of seniors. He's joined us today; he's in the public gallery. I'd ask Mr. Daly to stand and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

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

Highway Cleanup Campaign

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, May 3, from 7 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon, the 21st annual highway cleanup campaign takes place on Alberta's primary highways. Volunteers from the Junior Forest Wardens, the Boy Scouts, 4-H clubs, and other community groups' volunteers will be out on the highways picking up litter from the ditches of Alberta's highways.

Last year these young volunteers cleaned close to 6,000 kilometres of Alberta's primary highway ditches. They picked up close to 37,000 bags of garbage. I applaud these volunteers for keeping our highways clean year after year. Tourists have often commented on how clean we are as a province of Alberta. This is in large part thanks to our young people for their hard work in keeping our Alberta highways clean.

This year, we're expecting close to 7,000 participants to be out on Saturday, May 3, from 7 to 3 cleaning the ditches along our highways. They will be easily recognized wearing the bright orange safety vests for their own protection.

1:40

Safety is a major concern with Alberta Transportation and Utilities. Before the annual cleanup takes place, clubs are provided with Alberta highways cleanup manuals that instruct co-ordinators on how to plan and co-ordinate a safe cleanup campaign for their group. They in turn provide a safety training course to all the participants. All volunteers must stay off the highways. This includes the paved shoulders. Also as part of an awareness campaign for motorists, signs are placed along the highway to warn drivers that they are entering the cleanup areas. Radio commercials will be airing on both Friday and Saturday to warn people as well.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank these young Albertans for doing us all a great service. I would also like to remind everyone to drive with caution to make sure that our young volunteers have a safe day.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues and I would also like to thank the many volunteers who help keep our province clean. They know the importance of keeping our highways clean, especially each spring. We can't mention all the individuals and organizations that take a part in this, but I do want to commend our young Albertans – our 4-H members, Scouts, junior wardens, and others – who continue their efforts to keep our province clean. They truly are our leaders of tomorrow.

We used to have Pitch-In Week in this province, which was a great program to help keep our highways clean, and I'm sorry to see that program go, but I would also like to recognize the excellent work now being done by those who have adopted a stretch of the highway. This program and all these programs in this cleanup highway day on Saturday make us all aware of the work that must keep going into keeping our highways clean and will hopefully discourage others from littering along our highways.

Albertans appreciate the beauty of this province, and many tourists come here because of the beauty of our place. This program shows Albertans' pride and commitment to keeping our province clean and beautiful.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: First Official Opposition main question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Hospital Equipment Failures

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a woman, making choices about your reproductive future is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Four women made this decision and thought they had undergone successful tubal ligations at the Cold Lake hospital between 1993 and this spring. However, due to faulty equipment their tubal ligations failed, and all four women became pregnant. My question is to the Minister of Health. Has the Lakeland regional health authority taken the appropriate steps to notify all women who have undergone this procedure at the Cold Lake hospital in the last four years?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the alleged events, and therefore I will certainly undertake to investigate the situation and provide an answer to the hon. member, but I do not have that information at present.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. To the same minister: what kind of compensation is the minister prepared to give these women who have had their lives involuntarily changed due to faulty equipment resulting from government cutbacks?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, I will investigate the situation relative to the mention of equipment and circumstances within this regional health authority at Cold Lake and provide an answer back in terms of my findings and what follow-up action may or may not have been taken.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Is the minister then prepared to launch a provincewide review of hospital equipment so that other situations like this will not occur as a result of faulty equipment?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the incidents that have come to my attention regarding the failure of hospital equipment have, to my experience in the months that I have been Minister of Health, been dealt with responsibly and quickly by regional health authorities or by the personnel within the hospital itself. Therefore I do not see any need to commit to any provincewide review, although, as I have said, I am prepared to certainly look into this particular alleged incident.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Credit Counselling Services of Alberta Ltd.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before the Klein revolution the rate of personal bankruptcy in this province was dropping. However, since this Premier has taken office, Albertans have been declaring bankruptcy at an alarming rate. The Premier's answer to the problem is to privatize counseling services for individuals needing help and to set up a charitable foundation. My questions are to the Premier. On what basis did your government choose a five-month-old company to receive a \$1 million government contract to provide debt counseling services?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I'm not familiar with that particular situation. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs is, and I'll have her reply.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today I have just returned from Calgary where with great pride and about two dozen people we launched the celebrated opening of the Credit Counselling Services of Alberta. This has been launched with very strong volunteer activities involving home economists, Grant MacEwan college, other members of the banking and credit lending institutions, public-sector people, as well as staff who had spent two years downsizing their department and rightsizing credit counseling services. The pride in that room was phenomenal. The success is obvious. The opportunity for Albertans to gain strength from their peers and from professionals in overcoming financial information and problems that they've had in reporting and claiming and bankruptcies is huge.

Thank you.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is also to the Premier. What's in the contract to ensure that this company doesn't end up broke, like CKUA did?

MR. KLEIN: CKUA is back on the air, as I understand it, and operating quite well. But relative to the details, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister reply.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Speaker, may I just comment that we intend to bring legislation forward that will address the full particulars of the formation of this foundation and that it is to be ready, hopefully, for this spring session. I would advise you that by the bylaws of the corporation the membership is strictly volunteer and that the accountability both through a staff member, Mr. Rick Beaupre, as well as quarterly reporting, financial statements, and an audited process under the Auditor General's terms of reference and the accountability Act is already in place.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What this government is setting up as a charity to provide counseling services to individuals in need . . .

Speaker's Ruling Preambles to Supplementary Questions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we know the agreement. Please sit down. Let us just remind ourselves of what we've all agreed to in terms of preambles. The hon. member has now her third question, succinctly, to the point. The hon. minister doing the question will respond succinctly, to the point, with brevity as well, hopefully.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you for your sage advice, Mr. Speaker.

Credit Counselling Services of Alberta Ltd. (continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Can the Premier explain how 10 people will provide counseling services to 900 Albertans a month?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I will have the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs reply.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is not simply 10 people; it is a board of 11 people. It is a group of people that are contracting and involving other people from the public. We've got more than that that's happening down in Calgary, and I'd invite the hon. member to come and have a view of it. We'd be pleased to take her around.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: Official Opposition third main question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Treasury Branches

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Treasury Branches have provided an incredibly valuable service to Albertans over the past 59 years, particularly so in rural Alberta, but times change and things have to move on in view of realities of today. Now, despite earning something like \$125 million in net income over the past five years, Alberta Treasury Branches still face an accumulated deficit of at least \$51 million, and that amount could be growing. The fact is that in order to remain competitive, Alberta Treasury Branches will need an immediate infusion of at least \$500 million in capital to effectively compete with other financial institutions. My questions are to the Provincial Treasurer, respecting the fact that Alberta Treasury Branches do report to him. Can the Provincial Treasurer tell us why Alberta Treasury Branches continue to lag so far behind private-sector financial institutions in such critical areas as productivity, profitability, asset quality, liquidity, even after earning this \$125 million in net income during the past five years?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the finance critic is finally acknowledging, somewhat anyway, the strength of this particular organization. With the nature of the questions that have come over the last few days, I think there may be some concern to depositors or even people thinking of doing business with Treasury Branches. Nine hundred thousand deposit accounts: that's a lot of people. Eight billion dollars in deposits. Eighty thousand Albertans planning their retirement right now through ATB through RRSPs. Last year alone almost 7,800 families took

out mortgages through ATB. Twenty-four thousand small and medium-sized business loans: very significant.

So when the member talks about lagging behind, there is a very real concern that the government has and that Albertans have in terms of ATB's overall position. That's why long before this question period, long before this session, as a matter of fact last year a board was put in place, private-sector individuals to oversee some of the evaluation that had to be taking place, is taking place, and continues to take place with this operation. It is being done. Why aren't they offering certain services that other banks are offering? Legislation prohibits that right now, and I'm glad to hear that the member will be supporting legislation we're bringing out to in fact see ATB on a more established, level playing field.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask the Provincial Treasurer . . . [some applause] Is that applause for me? Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder what steps the Provincial Treasurer in conjunction with the board of directors that he referred to is taking now to try and help Alberta Treasury Branches raise that much-needed \$500 million to remain effective and competitive in today's financial world.

MR. DAY: I should probably invite the member to have lunch or supper or breakfast with me some day and try to understand in more detail where exactly they're coming from. One day they're saying: you should have nothing to do with, no influence at all in ATB. Now he is asking me what cash I'm putting into this particular organization.

Hon. member, \$200,000 was put into this organization in 1938 to see it launched. Since then this Treasurer and no Treasurer previous to myself has put cash into the organization.

I'll have to get a little stronger grip, I guess, on where they're coming from. Of course, they're against privatization in every area, and now they're saying: privatize it yesterday, without even consulting. Mr. Speaker, there is no cheque in front of me to go into ATB. A considered, an intelligent, and a rational evaluation is taking place.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I wasn't asking the Treasurer for cash, as you know, Mr. Speaker, but I appreciate the answer nonetheless.

Will the Provincial Treasurer consider allowing ATB to raise this \$500 million it needs to stay effective and competitive by offering a sale of shares to the public for all Albertans to participate in? That's one way that they could raise that money, if they decide to stay in the banking business.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, again I congratulate the member because I have said to him on a number of occasions: if you've got any ideas, or as you're talking to Albertans, as we are, bring them forward; we'll pass those on to the Treasury Branches, to their board. As a matter of fact, their 3,000 employees I think also should be taken into consideration. These are the types of things that we've been very open about in terms of saying that with any organizations in this province if people have ideas on how these organizations can fulfill their mandate, meet the needs, be financially viable, and satisfy the concerns of Albertans, then bring forward those ideas. This is not an overnight process. This is the type of thing, given the breadth of this operation which I talked about a few moments ago, that is something that's going to take great consideration, and I'm glad that he's willing to be part of the process in a careful way.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I wish to file four copies of an Executive Council memorandum dated May 7, 1992, which says, "At its meeting of May 6, 1992, Cabinet agreed that a Treasury Branch Advisory Board . . . be established." In fact, the decision to appoint a board seemed so imminent that government members were being asked to make recommendations as to who should be on this board. My question to the Premier is this: why did it take from May 6, 1992, a full four years later to March 20, 1996, for a board of directors to finally be appointed?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that there is a vast difference between an advisory board and a board of directors, which really sets policy and directs the ongoing management of the Alberta Treasury Branches. I recall that - well, I'm not at liberty to really discuss what was discussed in cabinet, but generally there was some discussion that I became aware of relative to the advisory board, but it never did come about.

I can tell you that as a matter of this government's policy we decided that the ATB needed new direction and that perhaps the best way to provide that direction was through an arm's-length, private-sector board of directors, and indeed that was put in place.

MS BARRETT: Four years later.

Mr. Speaker, is the reason that cabinet decided not to get that board in place, as recommended in 1992, because they didn't want the questionable loans of Treasury Branches such as Pocklington Financial, Ryckman Financial, West Edmonton Mall, et cetera to be subject to the scrutiny of an external board?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that is pure speculation. I have no idea why the government of the day didn't proceed with the advisory board or why the Treasurer of the day didn't proceed with the advisory board.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier at least commit to asking the directors of the Treasury Branches, as a way of restoring public trust in this important Alberta financial institution, to put an end to questionable loans that they've been handing out rather than rushing in with unseemly haste to sell the Treasury Branches, as the Liberals are so irresponsibly suggesting?

MR. KLEIN: On the latter point, Mr. Speaker, I agree. Relative to our relationship with the board of directors and the management and the ongoing business of the Treasury Branch relative to loans and to whom loans are made, I will have the hon. Provincial Treasurer reply.

2:00

MR. DAY: On a number of those points raised, I appreciate the fact that the leader of the NDP has really focused in on this question of speed. It's the Liberals who keep standing up saying: sell it, sell it, sell it. Now, from a previous business experience in auctioneering - I mean I'd be happy to take that on and could rattle it through, but I'm afraid it would be very inappropriate given the timing, the size, as we've already talked about, and the fact that this must be a discussion that involves all Albertans.

In terms of the actual loans and where they are and who has got them, members of this government, MLAs do not get involved in discussions on loans. Further to that, the member will be pleased to know that a loan loss review has been ordered by ATB through their board and to use strict financial business practices in doing that loan loss review. The results of that in the financials should

be out sometime in June, and it'll be very clear: exactly the extent of these loans and the level of risk.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Flood Relief

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities, responsible for disaster services. During the past couple of weeks we've heard more than we would like about flood disasters across the country, not the least of which were in northern Alberta. In light of the federal government's fairly quick response to the province of Manitoba for shared assistance, I wonder if the minister could tell us what response or action he has received or heard of from the federal government for relief assistance in Alberta.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, and certainly our condolences go out to the constituents of the hon. Member for Peace River as well as the hon. Member for Fort McMurray because of the difficulties that they are experiencing.

The process that is in place. It's a joint sharing process as far as the disaster funding is concerned. The provincial government is responsible for the first dollar per capita, or \$2.7 million. The next \$2 per capita are joint shared by the federal and provincial government 50-50. The next \$2 per capita, or \$5.4 million, are shared at the rate of 25 percent provincial government, 75 percent federal government, and the last, anything over and above that, is shared at the rate of 10 percent provincial government, 90 percent federal government.

We have been in discussions with our federal counterpart in the province of Alberta. There has been no offer to front end the cost of this particular program from the federal government; nevertheless, we have been in discussions.

Around 100 applications have been taken from Peace River to date, and about 70 have been received from the Fort McMurray area. Our people have been working as expeditiously as possible, and to date, Mr. Speaker, we have now got five cheques in the mail to help deal with this terrible disaster that's befallen those people.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: I wonder if he could tell us if there are any outstanding payments for disaster relief from the federal government owing to Alberta for previous disasters.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We have two outstanding programs that are still on the books and certainly we are working on, and there is still a federal responsibility for a portion of these two outstanding payments. That involves the southwest disaster fund, where the flooding took place in 1995 in southwestern Alberta, as well as the Lesser Slave Lake disaster of last year. The individuals have been paid in those two disasters. However, the municipal infrastructure problems that are still being worked on have yet to be fully paid. The federal government has participated in these programs. However, there is still some payment to be made as a result of the damages that came about.

MR. FRIEDEL: With specific reference to the Peace River situation, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister could indicate what the specific status is of relief assistance for that community.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The situation, particularly in Peace River where there are a large number of businesses involved, is indeed creating some problems as far as the process and as far as the formula is concerned. As of this morning the mayor of the town of Peace River has appealed the process, and we will be taking forward his appeal to our federal counterpart to engage in further discussions, because there are certain aspects of the formula as it is structured today that indeed make it very difficult for businesses to be eligible. The only businesses that are eligible, of course, are those that aren't eligible for flood insurance or insurance of any kind. Indeed these people are caught in a very difficult situation. They're caught in a situation where they have to make immediate decisions, yet they don't know where some of that funding is going to come from.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Labour Relations Board

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Guide to the Labour Relations Code states:

The [Labour Relations] Board is the independent and impartial tribunal responsible for the interpretation and enforcement of the Labour Relations Code.

My questions today are for the Premier. Does the Premier take any steps to ensure the absolute impartiality of members that his government appoints to this board?

MR. KLEIN: Impartiality is very subjective. You know, all people have their views on matters.

Mr. Speaker, we put in a process some time ago to make sure that there was a screening process through the public administration office of those appointments to the various boards, authorities, agencies, and commissions, and I would assume that is done in all cases. I would like to know what the hon. member is driving at.

MR. MacDONALD: How is this consistent with the fact that the recently reappointed vice-chair of the Labour Relations Board is credited with giving \$34,000 in political donations to the Progressive Conservative Party over the past four years?

MR. KLEIN: Well, that's a little over \$7,000 a year. No. It's \$8,000 a year. Who is this person? I would like to get to know him or her better. I don't know who the hon. member is talking about, but obviously he or she likes the Conservative Party.

MR. MacDONALD: Will the Premier take steps to ensure that all individuals who serve on quasi-judicial boards refrain from participating in partisan political activities during their terms?

MR. KLEIN: You know, Mr. Speaker, then we would be excluding the majority of Albertans, because the majority of Albertans voted for this party to govern this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Apprenticeship Programs

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. Alberta is recognized as having one of the most outstanding

apprenticeship systems on the continent. Over the past months you have been involved in consultation with employers, employees, and apprentices to see how the system could be improved. How will you make the apprenticeship system more responsive to the growing need for skilled workers, and what did you learn from your consultations?

MR. DUNFORD: The Alberta apprenticeship training program cannot be defined as ephemeral.

AN HON. MEMBER: You pronounced it wrong.

MR. DUNFORD: Did I pronounce it wrong? Ephemeral. That's better.

Mr. Speaker, it has a long and distinguished history here in Alberta and in Canada. However, as my friend the Minister of Education often says, just because something works well doesn't mean it can't work a little bit better.

2:10

So with that in mind the department and the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board have entered into a series of consultations. A discussion paper was drafted and circulated. Mr. Speaker, we had about 1,400 responses to this discussion paper. We've been able to put those responses now into a document, and in fact it has been circulated. If there's any member here in the Assembly that wishes to be apprised, then, of the remarks that are coming back, we'd certainly be pleased to get them a copy.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question to the same minister. In some parts of the province the business sector is telling us that they cannot meet skill shortages for tradespeople. Would you care to comment on this?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, before you proceed, please, the question period is not the place for the searching of opinions.

Proceed, hon. member. [interjections] The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: In that instance, then, let me rephrase it. What are we going to do about it?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation here in Alberta where we have approximately 9 percent of Canada's working-age population, but we currently have enrolled in apprenticeship programs about 18 percent of the total apprentices here in the country. So we're talking, as of December of 1996, about 24,000 apprentices here in this province. We are out there training. There is a situation, however, because of the Alberta advantage and the growth that we're facing in this province, where we're going to be under an extreme demand. I thank you for the question, because this is an excellent opportunity for me to say to all of the young people and all of the unemployed people in Alberta that there are excellent careers available in the apprenticeship trades.

MR. BRODA: Supplementary question to the same minister: in this instance, then, when will Albertans know the changes you will be making in apprenticeship?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned how we have the response document out for public review and comment. We

expect to be closing that off shortly, and then we're attempting to provide streamlined regulations and guidelines for the apprenticeship program, hopefully in 1997.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Conflicts of Interest Act

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent events have demonstrated that once again there are serious loopholes in Alberta's conflict of interest Act. These issues were addressed in the Tupper report almost a year and a half ago. Only now has the government given us any indication that they're prepared to bring changes to this Act. To the Minister of Justice: in order to restore public confidence in the public process, will the minister commit that an amendment Bill will be introduced soon enough that it can be debated and voted on this session?

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. SOETAERT: He said yes?

MS OLSEN: He said yes. That's very good. We like that.

Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: in light of public concerns about the weakness of this Act, will the minister reconsider the government's position and implement all of the recommendations in the Tupper report?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, we spent a great deal of time evaluating the Tupper report recommendations. We feel that some of them certainly can be implemented and incorporated into the Act. There are others which we feel can be dealt with differently and yet quite as effectively as the Tupper report wished that they would be, but let's wait until the Act is tabled before I comment further.

MS OLSEN: The first answer was very good.

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. member. [interjection] Hon. member, to the question.

MS OLSEN: Right. My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Justice: will the minister commit that the amendment Bill will contain provisions requiring that there be a public judicial inquiry when the conflict of interest investigated involves a Premier, a cabinet minister, or a leader of the opposition?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the question period is not the point for debate on Bills that have yet to be introduced. First of all, the Bill has to be introduced before we proceed on that.

I think we'll move on to the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Disabled Children's Services

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've met quite a number of outstanding parents and caregivers of handicapped children. They are very special people. We need to be able to remove the barriers to assist them in the services that they provide to those children. My question this afternoon is to the minister responsible for children's services. What steps is she taking to

ensure barriers are removed during the redesign of children's services?

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much. First of all, families of children with disabilities face tremendous and challenging lifelong struggles, Mr. Speaker. Anytime that we're dealing with concerns that are brought forward by families of children with disabilities, we must ensure that their concerns are heard. In fact, when we're talking about what needs to be done, we have a process that is going on presently to look at a funding model to be able to bring forward concerns from those people who are impacted by the redesign, and we'd like to ensure that they're going to be involved.

In this funding model the consultation is occurring. In fact, in Red Deer we had a consultation process on April 14, and I would say that we would have another consultation process so that we can ensure that their concerns are going to be heard and will be implemented in the funding model.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, how can the minister say this when the four pillars in the proposed model include age, single parenthood, low income, and aboriginal factors but don't include any factors with respect to handicapped children?

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, the proposed funding model was really based on research that was done by the various regions as well as the funding committee. That not only included research from all across Canada, but it also included words and views heard from people during the consultations that occurred. During all the redesign of services, the 12,000 people that have been involved in this process have also brought their concerns forward, and the committee decided to use what they call a funding model based on population. We also looked at what regional health authorities had done and ensured that we looked at what they were doing to make sure we reflected that.

MRS. SLOAN: Point of Order.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I think it's really key. When we're talking about families with special-needs children, we must ensure their views are going to come forward. I would suggest that if they are truly concerned about these things – and I know they are – they come forward and deal with our funding committee, as well as within their various regions, as we go through the consultation process.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, if I . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, we've spent a fair amount of time on this subject.

Hon. member.

MR. DOERKSEN: To the same minister: will the minister commit today to ensure that the needs of handicapped children are incorporated and factored into the funding model?

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, that's probably the greatest concern that we've been hearing as our funding model consultation process has been going on. I really strongly believe that we need to be able to ensure that in everything that's going to come forward the children with special needs will be mentioned, and we'll ensure that we have that needs basis addressed. I would

encourage that. The more people that get involved in the consultation, the more we can determine how that's going to be done. So I believe that as we go through this process, we need to know how it has to be done, and anyone out there who wants to be involved, please come forward and indicate to us how you would like to see it happen. We've had a lot of consultation, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

2:20

Child Welfare

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to raise some follow-up questions with respect to the proposed child welfare funding model to the minister responsible. The credibility of this proposed model is seriously in question. Number one, it is based on the 1989 and 1991 census. In addition, the steering committee members and the consultant leading the project: none have experience in the design or implementation of a funding model of this nature in this province or in any other province. My questions are to the minister without portfolio: how do you prove to the members, the stakeholders, and the citizens of the province that this is a credible process when you have no one of experience leading the process and your statistics are based on '89 and '91 figures?

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, before I go ahead, I think it's really important to note that when we're talking about a process, we're talking about involving the people who have been involved through – when you're talking about the credibility of the people who are involved, it makes me question why you would question the credibility of people, people who have children with handicaps.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about this proposed funding model, we have gone across this nation to see what needs to be done, how it can be done the best way, and that consultation is now going forward. When we are talking about the process that is being utilized, I would suggest to the members of the Liberal Party, first of all, they have indicated that this process is probably the greatest one. I'll just read something off this caucus news report.

The long awaited Children's Commissioner Report on revamping Child Welfare should have a positive impact on children's services, provided the government keeps its promise to respond to these recommendations, says Liberal Leader Grant Mitchell.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why should people believe in this consultation process or be involved in it when questions are restricted to five minutes and there are no minutes or no record kept of the dialogue that occurs in the consultation meetings?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this is really important. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview just came from a meeting that we had, and as a matter of fact, there are some minutes that are being kept. Everywhere these regions are holding their consultations they are bringing forward those concerns. So for the members and everybody out there who's watching, I think it's really key that when we are talking about funding and we're talking about handicapped children's services, we deal with the issue.

Just for the member's sake I will once again bring out some

information here. I think this is so important, Mr. Speaker, very, very important. When we are talking about how people want to be involved, here's something I think that really will remind the Liberal caucus. They're saying:

We in this House are trying to fix a system that has never served Albertans well. The leap that is planned is so big that it needs to be done in small steps.

Mr. Speaker, another one which I think is so key . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. minister. The hon. minister should also be prepared to table the document in question with the required copies if she chooses to quote in the House.

Hon. member.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why would people be involved in the process when the department communicates to them in these meetings that the final decisions on what funding will be provided will be made in July and August with no meaningful consultation with the stakeholders?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, before I go on, I would like to indicate that when we're talking about consultation, the funding model consultations occurred starting on April 11 in Westlock to May 7 in Wainwright. We've got 12 to 13 and maybe even 18 consultations that will occur. A second round will be occurring to make sure we hear the concerns that the handicapped children's services people and other departments have brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to bring out something here.

"This is the way we should be going," Hanson said. "Wouldn't you hate it if you put . . . a year . . . into something and then saw the politicians just playing politics?"

THE SPEAKER: My one hope, hon. members, on this Thursday afternoon is that the hon. minister for children's services will never tell anyone that she learned her response style in question period from this person.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Agricultural Use of Crown Land

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the recent election campaign both rural and urban constituents raised issues surrounding the government policy of public land and grazing leases, particularly pertaining to land use, public access, surface rights, lease rates, transfers, and the process for acquiring leases. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can you advise Banff-Cochrane constituents how these complex issues are being addressed by your department?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Premier has announced the appointment of the very esteemed MLA for Drayton Valley-Calmor to chair a task force of MLAs that will be appointed shortly. We will announce the appointments within a few days.

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is: what will be the scope of this review?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, this review will be focused on agricultural lease issues and other related activities on these parcels of land that the Member for Banff-Cochrane earlier

indicated, approximately 5.5 million acres, and this will be in the white area of the province. Public lands in the green area are under the management of the minister of the environment.

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, my last supplementary is: who will these discussions be involving, and when will they start?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the terms of reference for the task force are just being currently drafted. The task force will be meeting with the interest groups across the province, and upon completion of the first round of the consultations, that will be brought back to government. We'll capture what has been said at those meetings, and then there will be a second round of consultations to ensure that all Albertans have every opportunity for input into this very important issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Mental Health Services

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drop-in centres in inner-city shelters throughout the province are being overwhelmed with people seeking refuge. The reality is that many of these individuals have mental health issues. Communities within Alberta are also being inundated with individuals in need of mental health services. Unfortunately, these programs are not there. One can only imagine how the communities will struggle to deal with this influx of people once the transfer of mental health services actually begins. My question is to the Minister of Health. Given the current waiting list for housing, outreach, rehab, vocational services, what plan does the minister have to deal with this issue now instead of waiting for the divestment?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises what I feel is a valid concern, and it is a priority in terms of the planning of the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board. They are developing their overall plan to strengthen community services to individuals needing mental health care. As well, they are looking at the proper balance between community services and acute care and tertiary care programs in the province.

I do not have any specific announcements to make today in response to the question, but a very thorough planning process is in place. We should shortly have that plan officially announced, and it can move ahead a little bit more quickly.

MR. GIBBONS: My supplementary question is: whatever happened to the three-year business plan on mental health which the minister said he would have completed by March 31, 1997?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member may not be aware, there are a couple of factors involved here. First of all, regional health authorities indicated to government, to the Minister of Health that they were not ready for the divestment of community mental health services. There was not a plan in place that they felt they were aware of or comfortable with at that particular stage.

Therefore one of the decisions – and I think it is a wise one to have been made. This divestiture of community services to RHAs was delayed for two reasons: one, to allow the new board to actually get in place and plan for this particular purpose and, secondly, to allow regional health authorities to be able to work on their own plans in readiness for this particular transfer of community mental health services.

2:30

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, my third supplementary is: has the department been out in the communities like my Edmonton-Manning constituency where the downloading has been happening for the last three years? Now it's moving into Riverbend with American owners of houses.

MR. JONSON: Well, I agree with the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that certainly the answer to strengthening our mental health care system is not to have circumstances where some people feel that everybody can be quickly put into the community and may not be able to be supported within those particular communities. So there is work currently going on in strengthening our overall community mental health supports in the inner cities of both Edmonton and Calgary. There are a number of community agencies involved with community mental health care. We're certainly making progress, I think, in that area. Although as I said, I acknowledge that there is a problem there.

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

Long-term Disability Program

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One in 20 government employees is on long-term disability at a cost to the taxpayer of approximately \$24 million a year. Our government implemented a pilot project along with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees which was aimed at reducing the number of civil servants on long-term disability. I understand that this pilot project provided employees with a valuable resource which assisted them in their return to work while realizing considerable cost savings. My question is to the minister responsible for the personnel administration office. When will the early support and recovery assistance documents be made public so that the cost savings and health assistance to our government employees can be recognized and acted upon?

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, the early support and recovery assistance has been sent to the president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and the Public Service Commissioner. The findings will be communicated to the pilot departments, and that includes Alberta public works and also Alberta Health. The findings will be reported to those employees in the near future. So until that time we are going to wait to see the results of that.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supplementary to the same minister: what is the projected cost savings to the taxpayer for a provincewide program? Given that answer, I'm hoping you can comment on that.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you. Well, our early understanding is that there was in fact reduced time away from work and there were some improvements in employee productivity. Early estimates at this point are that about 65 percent of the savings that were realized can be attributable to the long-term disability. If in fact we were able to translate these particular savings across a whole department – let's say that all departments were agreeable to getting involved in such a recovery assistance program, we'd probably be looking at savings somewhere in the area of \$5 million.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the target date for provincewide implementation of the

program? Given the first answer, it seems to me that any delay in such a valuable project could cost the taxpayers a substantial amount of money while denying valuable health assistance to government employees.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be sensitive to that. Following communication with Alberta government departments and discussions with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, we will try to implement this program as soon as possible. Implementation will include a communication to all employees and education programs for both management and supervisory staff before the program can be put into effect.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: There are three members' statements today, first of all by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, and then followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Amoco Plant at Joffre

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited. The recent announcement of Amoco Canada Petroleum adds to a long and growing list of good news for the constituency of Lacombe-Stettler and the province of Alberta. There have now been four announcements of consequence. Amoco Canada will be entering for the first time the Canadian petrochemical business with a \$250 million plant at Joffre, where they will produce linear alpha olefins. Novacor Chemicals' board of directors recently ratified their plans to build a second polyethylene plant at Joffre at a cost of \$280 million. As well, they announced that their new joint venture ethylene plant with Union Carbide at Joffre will be expanded by over 40 percent, pushing the total cost to \$865 million. The proposed new plants, including Union Carbide's planned polyethylene plant at Prentiss, will mean a massive construction boom between start-up this fall and completion in the year 2000.

Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that up to 2,500 construction workers will be needed at peak construction periods and that the new expansions are expected to create approximately 400 permanent jobs. An equal number of spin-off jobs will affect every sector of the local economy: contractors, service providers, realtors, retailers. Good news indeed.

Existing petrochemical plants in Alberta have proven track records for profitability, efficiency, and safety. They are among the most efficient in the world because the people who run them are both highly skilled and motivated, an Alberta plus, the Alberta advantage.

Thank you, Amoco, for choosing to do business in Alberta and particularly in my neighbourhood. Thank you, Alberta, for fostering a business climate conducive to growth and investment so that companies like Amoco can stand up and say with conviction: Alberta very clearly won out.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Treasury Branches

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fifty-nine years ago Alberta Treasury Branches began an appreciated legacy of valuable services to Albertans, especially so in rural areas. In the 1930s and 1940s when chartered banks reduced their presence in

Alberta, the Treasury Branches were there to provide the services required. But the status quo of Alberta Treasury Branches is no longer working as originally designed because ATB is falling far behind its competitors.

Reports commissioned by this government clearly state that Treasury Branches need an immediate infusion of at least \$500 million to remain competitive with private-sector financial institutions. How do Alberta Treasury Branches meet this \$500 million challenge? That is the big issue. That's the big question.

Mr. Speaker, here are a couple of options. One option is to give the Treasury Branches the ability to generate income in such areas as brokerage services, insurance services, trust and advisory services, financial planning, mutual funds, and electronic services. However, this would mean that government is getting into business, because it would then be competing with private sector interests that are already involved in those businesses. The second option is to raise this \$500 million through a public share offering, which I suspect most Albertans will support. Not following up either of these options, however, means coming up with yet another way to generate the needed capital. This is where the government has to consider the possible sale of some of the ATB assets.

In short, three things should be considered. Get out of the banking business entirely, but if you're going to stay, then consider the options listed above. Secondly, get an independent market evaluation of the Alberta Treasury Branches' real worth. Thirdly, based on this independent market evaluation, consider selling off those ATB assets that you can, retain those that you must, and ensure that rural areas are not compromised in the process.

These are issues that the government must address. It is very necessary to do them soon. The time to commission more reports has passed. It is now time to act. I would sincerely ask the government to heed those words.

Thank you.

Tax Credits

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, we have had a few debates in this Assembly about citizen initiative and the importance of direct democracy. Politicians across Canada wax eloquent about getting out of the pockets of the taxpayers and about spending money on priorities of constituents' choice. We talk about finding out the will of people through the use of referendums. We hear ongoing discussions of tax reform, like simplifying tax collection, debating the merits of consumption tax in favour of income tax, allocation of taxing power to municipalities, and so on. But lost in the debate is the simple fact that if we left the money in the hands of the taxpayer, the taxpayer would in fact decide where to allocate that money without a referendum. While that statement is somewhat simplistic, there is certainly an arrogance in governments of all levels in assuming that as the distributors of the pool of tax moneys, they know best.

2:40

On November 8, 1994, this Assembly passed a motion to urge the government to provide tax credit incentives to encourage charitable donations. Mr. Speaker, while not yet implemented, it is still a good idea and one that puts decision-making into the hands of the individual; in effect, direct democracy without the burdensome mechanisms of referendums, petitions, and the like. Tax credit benefits accruing from political contributions far exceed the tax credit benefits one gets from charitable donations. Yet in

many ways the principle is the same. Donors get to decide what is important to them and to support that cause. Increasing the tax credit incentive for charitable donations to level the playing field as compared to political contributions will go a long way to assisting charities of worth and value, but it is the donor who makes that choice. It puts real power into the hands of the taxpayer by allowing them to distribute their own tax money. I urge the Provincial Treasurer to act accordingly.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader – oh, sorry. The Opposition House Leader.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. That would make it more efficient.

Pursuant to Standing Orders I would request that the Government House Leader now enlighten the Assembly as to the projected government business for next week.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always try and enlighten the House, and I'm sure I'll do the same right now.

On Monday we will be doing a little bit of address and reply to the Speech from the Throne. Then in Government Bills and Orders – and this really applies to the entire week – we'll be addressing Bills 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, and 9. However, the Opposition House Leader certainly has our commitment that during the week we will work with him to ensure that the opposition critics are available when the Bills are coming up for discussion. Also, we'll be doing third reading of Bill 7 and Government Motion 16, that the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed. That evening we are in Committee of Supply, and that has been published before. We are looking at, again, Bill 7 at third reading that evening.

On May 6, I am pleased to say, His Honour will be in attendance to provide Royal Assent to Bills 6 and 7. Then we will continue on with second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading for the various government Bills that I have just outlined. That evening again we're in Committee of Supply and the subcommittees that have been previously published.

On May 7 in the evening we have Committee of Supply, and we are looking at reporting for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Energy, and Education. Then on Thursday afternoon we have Committee of Supply, again the main estimates, day 15. We are looking at Economic Development and Tourism designated and at reporting for Public Works, Supply and Services and Municipal Affairs.

THE SPEAKER: There were several purported points of order raised during question period.

Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise under *Beauchesne* 317 in terms of "calling attention to any departure from the . . . customary modes of proceeding in debate" and also under Standing Orders where a member could seek explanation or some clarification from the Speaker on a ruling. I am approaching this with some caution because I truly am seeking information in the way of this explanation.

During Oral Question Period a question was put by my colleague for Edmonton-Norwood to the Minister of Justice

regarding a matter of very important government policy, and the question specifically was talking about the government's policy direction in dealing with conflicts of interest. The Government House Leader and Minister of Justice responded that legislation was pending. My colleague proceeded with a further question asking for the intended government action. This is really no different from several other exchanges that we have all heard in Oral Question Period. In fact, today there was a question from the Member for Peace River asking about the government's intended action on flood relief and what the government policy was in that regard. I'm curious, Mr. Speaker, as to your thinking in that ruling, which negated the final supplementary question from my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood.

THE SPEAKER: A fair question, Opposition House Leader. The Chair intervened and indicated that the purpose of question period was not to debate Bills and legislation. The Chair further intervened and basically would cite the basis for his intervention as *Beauchesne* 409(3), which reads, "The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis." Although the Government House Leader did indicate that he was going to be bringing forward legislation, the fact of the matter is that it hasn't come forward yet. In that respect the Speaker will argue that it is hypothetical to a certain degree. The question "cannot seek an opinion, either legal" – and I underline the word "legal" – "or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations."

The intervention came basically as a result of two things. First of all, the fact that question period should not be used for debating Bills. In this case the Bill had not been introduced, and the hon. member was seeking specific legal information with respect to the contents of the Bill. There is some need for some subjectivity with respect to some of these rulings, but in a nutshell those are the reasons, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would raise a point of order under Standing Order 23(i) and *Beauchesne* 495 in relation to the comments made in question period by the minister without portfolio responsible for children's services. Under these two areas, first of all the minister proposed to the public that the funding model consultations that are currently in progress across this province were based on consultation feedback, and in fact that is not the case. I have attended two of those consultations in the last two weeks. The model is based on '89 and '91 censuses. There is no provision for the public's feedback to be incorporated because people are restricted to five minutes. Also, there are no minutes kept of the comments made by stakeholders.

With respect to *Beauchesne* 495(1), the minister referred to two items, quoted from two items, I believe, quoted from a news release that was from 1993 but did not table it. I believe that she also referred to the fact that minutes were kept of the consultations. If they are kept, I would ask that those also be tabled in the House.

Thank you.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly, the hon. member is simply debating how one interprets the term "consultation."

Secondly, I might add I'm a little surprised at the hon. member

chastising the minister for not having tabled documents when in the past two weeks we've seen the opposition doing that every day. Now you, Mr. Speaker, correctly indicated to the minister that she should table the document, and I understand that she said she would. Really there's no point of order on this issue at all.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, from time to time – in this case it may be daily from time to time – during question period itself there may be a difference of opinion with respect to fact. Hon. members would certainly have a desire to continue debate beyond that which is either allocated or engendered within three questions. The Chair, in terms of listening very carefully to the exchange that was going on, did indicate the other day that there will be from time to time two entirely different interpretations of the same fact, which in this parliament becomes a way of recognition and dealing.

The hon. member is absolutely correct on the second point about the need to deal with tabling of documents. The Chair would like to draw to everyone's attention once again that should one choose to quote from a document, one should have the necessary copies of that document available in their hand to be tabled at that time, not in subsequent days. The gist of the argument and the gist of the continuation of the debate that may occur outside of this House can only occur if hon. members can deal with those documents and deal with them as documents and information of the House.

Speaker's Ruling

Questions to Private Members

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Chair has been asked outside the Chamber to elaborate on his brief ruling of April 24, 1997, concerning private members answering questions during question period. Hon. members may recall that the issue arose when the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler was asked a question in her capacity as chair of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Policy Secretariat. As this is early in the life of the 24th Legislature, the Chair wants to clarify this matter for the benefit of all members.

In the ruling last Thursday the Chair drew upon several previous Speaker's rulings on this point, in particular Speaker's rulings of October 7, 1993, November 7, 1994, and May 15, 1995. The gist of these rulings is that the purpose of question period is for members to hold the government accountable for its actions. Clearly, there can be no other finding by the Chair, as the principle of the executive being responsible to the Assembly is the cornerstone of responsible government in this country.

In his text *Constitutional Law of Canada*, third edition, by author Peter Hogg, Mr. Hogg goes so far as to say: "Responsible government is probably the most important non-federal characteristic of the Canadian Constitution." In the province of Alberta the executive is composed of the members of the Executive Council, all of whom have taken and subscribed to the oath for cabinet ministers. These are the individuals who speak for the government in this Assembly. Therefore, any questions relating to government policy should be directed to and answered by the member of Executive Council responsible for the area.

As the Chair indicated last Thursday, there are a few exceptions that have developed over the years. Questions may be put to and answered by chairs of standing policy committees but must relate only to procedural matters, such as agendas or activities of the respective committee, as the chairs are private members and not members of the executive.

Secondly, questions may be asked directly of members who

chair committees of the Assembly, but this would be a narrow range as these committees are not part of government. Certainly it would be highly unusual for these members to supplement answers by ministers.

Thirdly, in accordance with the practice of this Assembly, questions may be put to members who chair statutorily created boards, committees, or commissions but must relate directly to their responsibilities as an executive of that body. Once again, these individuals cannot speak for the government, so questions of policy must go to a member of Executive Council. The Chair realizes that situations may develop that will require returning to this issue. However, the Chair wanted to clarify the traditions and practices of this Assembly for all members, and the Chair will not be forwarding a copy of this written statement as it will be included in *Hansard*, which all members will have in the next day.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 7

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1997

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to rise during committee to continue the excellent debate that began yesterday with regard to Bill 7, that being the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1997.

Yesterday, Mr. Chairman, I made a number of points regarding the size of the supply estimate that's required here, which represents about 33 percent of the total budget, and the fact that I thought that was a bit high and that it was over too long a period of time. I made some points in support of that comment. Nonetheless, we did wind up seeing the Bill passed. I did concur with the government's need, so I voted with the government on that one to ensure they had the moneys necessary. But I did for the record want to register in general some of the problems that I have with the way these interim supply Bills come in from time to time, and I will enunciate on that a little bit further.

Today what I want to do is focus some attention on some questions directly to the Treasurer with regard to the \$3.557 billion in interim supply that is requested. Perhaps the Provincial Treasurer, in the spirit of the debate or even after the fact, could explain why he feels he needs this \$3.55 billion in interim supply when a total of only \$1 billion would in fact get us through the month of May 1997, when full supply is able to be granted.

As a follow-up . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, if you stand in your place, the Chair is obliged to assume that you're rising on a point of order, which I suspect not.

Sorry to interrupt you, Edmonton-Mill Creek. Would you please continue.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: It's not a problem, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your keeping the House in order for all of us.

Nonetheless, I'm curious to know whether or not the Provincial Treasurer expects some corrections of some sort to be made. Does he expect any that will be required to be made in the extra 90 days, which covers the extent of this full Bill, that might warrant a \$2.5 billion cushion? I think one could make the argument that by asking for \$3.5 billion, which takes us well past the end of May in terms of percentage of budget allocated, perhaps only a billion dollars would have been needed. That would have been a more palatable amount to put through as an appropriation at this stage. Can we expect to see some expenditure overruns or cost pressures, and if so, in what areas might they be? Perhaps there is some anticipation, Mr. Chairman, regarding some losses that might be forthcoming or perhaps some business loan difficulties that might be forthcoming or perhaps some losses on sales of certain assets. If that's the case, perhaps those could be explained.

Nonetheless, in light of the need to provide what I will call a \$2.5 billion cushion in this Bill, I was wondering whether the Treasurer might comment on the financial mechanisms that have been developed within the budget process to maximize the efficiency of government for cost-effective results. Or do such things perhaps exist at all? Is long-term planning defined by this government in an abbreviated way?

Now, given that this additional \$2.5 billion is being asked for in this Bill to a total of \$3.5 billion, I wonder if there is some system that could be put in place to hold individual departments and agencies accountable and responsible for their administration, perhaps in an explanatory fashion or some other way. At the same time, in reading through I was curious about, for example, the Health estimate of 32.3 percent of the total allocation and Energy getting an allocation of something in the area of 43 percent. I was wondering how the government determines its priorities for these interim supply allocations. What's the background they use to determine these amounts? What priorities do you use in determining interim supply allocations?

3:00

Now I'd just like to focus on a couple of the problems that I see here, and that's with regard to the fact that no programs are specified within each ministry vote. There doesn't seem to be enough accountability for how the money is intended to be spent, which I outlined yesterday, and I won't go into any great detail on that at this stage. However, the government does keep telling us that the business plans are a road map to the future. While I appreciate that metaphor, I also understand the Premier's metaphor about having the budget and the business planning process looked at as a house renovation. I would suggest that the budget and the business plans are indeed able to be likened to a house renovation, but I would suggest that that house needs some lights. In this case I would suggest that Bill 7 also needs some lights to inform members of this House a little more directly about the appropriations.

We want the government to be very serious about strategic planning and to do performance-based budgeting. That is expected and appreciated, if and when it happens. We know and we hope that the government is serious about fiscal responsibility and being held responsible for meeting goals and objectives and for developing quantifiable outcomes and output measures. We want them to be serious about effectiveness and efficiency, and we want them to be serious about outputs and outcomes. Later, during third reading, I would like to share with the Provincial Treasurer some thoughts that I have about how some of that might be accomplished, but for the moment I will take my seat, as I

promised to be brief at this stage, to allow other persons to join the debate or to move on with other business of the House.

I would simply conclude with this statement: reinventing government in the 1990s means taking some innovative steps within the budget process which enhance accountability and responsibility to Albertans. In forthcoming appropriation Bills, interim supply Bills as they're known, I would expect the Treasurer to act on some of these suggestions that have been made not only by myself but by others as well.

I thank the Assembly for its time.

MR. DAY: I'll also try and be brief, Mr. Chairman. I'll acknowledge that the budget process is something that can appear confusing at times, even though the Auditor General has commented on the efficacy of our accounting standards and says that we have the most open and accountable books. As I read into the record the other day, Dr. Mike Percy, former Liberal MLA and finance critic, also has commented likewise about the incredibly good state of the books of this province, as has the Institute of Chartered Accountants, and on and on it goes. But the process, I will recognize – and I'll try and be patient here – can be confusing to members, as it has been to me the years I've been here and still is somewhat from time to time, I will confess.

If the finance critic and others who may be interested would just focus on this for a few minutes. We have a number of different issues that have been raised, all related around and through Bill 7, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1997. So we need to understand the different instruments that are used by government in basically getting the taxpayers' dollars back out to the people.

If there had not been an election call this year and we had come into the Assembly for the spring session, as we usually do, sometime in February, there would have been the budget speech. In the immediate days following that, we would have had before all members a supplementary supply Act. Now, the supplementary supply Act, usually coming within a day or two of the budget, is for the purpose of dealing with money that has been needed in the previous budget year. If I can use this cycle as an example, in November of '96 the Minister of Health announced certain extra dollars that were going to go into health spending as a reinvestment. That was above and beyond the '96-97 budget. To make the whole situation legal, though that money was appropriated, it still has to come before the Assembly. We can't just spend the money and not be accountable for it. So in any given year you will inevitably have a supplementary supply Bill to deal with money that has been appropriated for the previous year. That's one that you have to deal with.

Then once the session starts – every session is like this – you need the interim supply Bills, and that's to cover the period of time before you actually have a vote in the whole Assembly for the whole budget, the full meal deal, as it were. It is meant to be just that. It's that interim period until you come to the main appropriation Bill, which could go into June of a given year. We have no guarantee how long that could be dragged out. We have to allow for basically a four-month cycle, especially to catch the payment cycles of grants at the front end and at the back end, be it in education or be it in health care or whatever it might be. You can't just say, "Well, I think the Liberals and the NDP will be working together closely on this, and we'll probably only need 21 days," or "We'll probably only need two weeks," or "There probably won't be a flood." You have to try and anticipate the greatest amount of time that you actually could go without having the main budget appropriated. So you have interim supply Bills.

That, as I said, is roughly judged on a four-month basis. So the member is fairly accurate in terms of saying that it could be up to 33 percent, 35 percent of the entire budget.

Now, the other instrument that's used from time to time is something called special warrants. There's actually the statutory ability – this is a little scary, but it needs to be in place in a democracy – for a government through order in council, meaning the cabinet, to actually appropriate dollars without discussion even taking place in the Assembly. The obvious reason for that is that we don't ever want to get to the point where we have to sit every day of the year. That would be a waste of time and money. But there are things that can happen from time to time which might require dollars to be appropriated. Through order in council, cabinet, and in a signing by the Lieutenant Governor there is the ability to get funds. But this government believes and I think the Liberal opposition believes that any time a special warrant is used in that way, people, this government should still be accountable to the broader Legislature. So when a special warrant is signed, there is a provision that the discussion and then a subsequent passing of a supplementary estimate take place so that the entire Assembly gets to see: here's what the Lieutenant Governor signed, and here's why he signed it.

Coming right specifically to this year, then, when we're not in a normal process but have the added enticement of an election, you're going to have to have at some point some supplementary estimates for the year's spending before. You're still going to need an interim supply Bill to cover you before the main Bill is done. This year, because there was an election, through order in council the Lieutenant Governor had to be approached, and the cabinet, still being the government even during the election period, had to say: "You know, about the money that normally would have just been passed through a supplementary supply Bill for '96-97, we went to the LG and we got him to sign and kick that money out. And money for interim supply? We didn't know what was going to happen with the election and how long until we were going to be back. We needed to get the dollars flowing so that payments could be made, whether it's paycheques to MLAs or the public service or out to the education and health sectors." So in fact the Lieutenant Governor this year signed these very important special warrants.

I'm going to give the Liberal opposition the benefit of the doubt. They were standing last night and suggesting that it might be a waste of time that we're even doing interim supply Bills or supplementary supply Bills. That was suggested, if you check *Hansard*. But if we did not do these Bills, what we would be saying to the Assembly and to all Albertans is: "Hey, the Lieutenant Governor signed a special warrant. We don't have to take it before this Assembly. We got the dough, and we're out of here." But we don't operate that way, and that's why these Bills are being brought forward.

In closing, I think I've explained the process here to the members opposite. Their heads are nodding, and I don't think it's because they're falling asleep.

3:10

The opposition finance critic raised an interesting point in terms of the dollars, themselves, that they don't seem to be very specific in the Bill. Well, the dollars are listed in schedules A and B, each department and how much. However, the opposition member has raised a good point. This represents part of the overall appropriation that's going to take place, and everything that's appropriated is subject to the estimates, the very significant performance measurements . . . [interjection] The House leader

wants me to wrap up. I was going to talk in some detail about the performance standards in his own department as an example, but he doesn't want me to, so I can refer to the page in the update. If you were to look at page 203, the Justice update in Budget '97, every dollar here that's in these appropriation Bills, these interim supply Bills, are subject to the full accounting process of the estimates and the performance and business standards. Every single one is still subject to that.

A final closing comment. On the issue of a better breakdown of the dollars – and I think the member understands now that every dollar here in these interim supply Bills has to be accounted for, explained, subject to the full accounting process, and the departments are subject to the performance measures. However, he said that the appendix in Bill 7 is relatively brief. Though each department has shown how much money is being advanced to them, it's not really broken down. I'm going to take that under advisement and see if for next year's budget – if we included all of that in the Bill, every dollar in the Bill, the Bill would look like these estimates books, and it would be too unwieldy, especially because we've already done it once.

Every dollar including those appropriated in these interim supply Bills are specifically shown here, but I will make an undertaking for next year to give an even greater breakdown on a departmental basis. As a matter of fact, I have one here for the finance critic, if he'd like to look at it. It doesn't have to be in the Bill itself, for the reason of being cumbersome, but we ask each department to break down the amounts. When they are suggesting how much they need on an interim basis, we say break it down, and it is broken down. I'll give the member a copy of this. Next year, as an undertaking, not as part of the Bill but in addition as information, we'll make that breakdown available.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the Bill be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain Bill. The committee reports the following: Bill 7.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. If we could have only one member at a time standing, then we can recognize that member.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I have not yet begun, but you are rising, then, on a point of order or something?

**Point of Order
Designation of a Department's Estimates**

MR. SAPERS: Yes, I'm rising on a point of order, and I'm doing so under *Beauchesne* 321, which reads:

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

I wanted to make sure I raised this point of order at the earliest possible opportunity, Mr. Chairman. The affront to procedure, I would submit, is a conflict that we are now about to enter between Standing Orders 58 and 57, specifically 58(4) and Standing Order 57(1).

If we take a look at 58(4), firstly, Mr. Chairman, you'll see that

the Leader of the . . . Opposition may, during the period when the estimates referred to in suborders (1) and (2) are under consideration by the Committee of Supply, by written notice to the Clerk prior to 4 p.m. on a Monday, designate one department's estimates to be considered by the committee on the following Thursday.

Standing Order 58(4) itself only refers to the Committee of Supply and not to subcommittees. That's an important point to keep in mind, because if you look at the wording of 57(1):

The Committee of Supply may establish subcommittees, in addition to the Designated Supply Subcommittees, consisting of members of the committee and, with respect to each subcommittee so established, shall designate its name, appoint its members and designate its chairman and deputy chairman.

Now, if we go back to Standing Orders, you'll see that Committee of Supply is really Committee of the Whole. The whole purpose of 57(1) is to break the members of the Assembly down into subcommittees for the consideration of estimates debates. Clearly, the intent of 58(4) is to exclude those departments designated by the Leader of the Official Opposition from that subcommittee process. Otherwise, there would be no reason for that subsequent Standing Order to have been written.

It has been a long-standing parliamentary tradition, in fact a principle in law, about the effect of subsequent clauses or subsequent legislation. The presence of 58(4), allowing the opposition leader to designate those committees for Committee of the Whole debate, would be in conflict with breaking into subcommittees, because the subcommittees have ordered some members be present someplace else. The whole point of designating a committee under 58(4) is to have all members present here in the Assembly to deal with that department's estimates.

Further, to strengthen the argument, Mr. Chairman, if you look at 57(2), you'll see a section about quorum.

One-third of the members of a subcommittee appointed under this Standing Order constitutes a quorum at any meeting of the subcommittee.

So again it becomes very clear that the intent is to establish a

different process in subcommittee, and this process should not interfere with the privilege of all members to be present for a designated department's debate under Standing Order 58(4).

3:20

Just before I close my submission and await your ruling, I will say that I've had some discussions with some members of the Table as well as with the Government House Leader, and the information that I have is that there is a belief that because this was the procedure that was followed last year, that has established the precedent and that it's all right. I would argue that a breach of process last year in no way justifies a continued breach of process. I mean, my mother taught me that two wrongs don't make a right. The fact is that we may have done it incorrectly last year, but you are aware, Mr. Chairman, of just how much protest and concern there was about the whole process last year. That concern and protest has continued this year, and we have now discovered yet another flaw in this subcommittee process.

I believe that in order to facilitate the Standing Orders and give all members their privilege, as is their right, we could not have a designated department, as so ordered under 58(4), having its estimates debated at the same time as a subcommittee under 57(1) is holding its proceedings.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader on the point of order as raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would refer to *Beauchesne* 321. It does state quite clearly that "a point of order against procedure must be raised promptly." I would suggest that this has not been raised at the earliest possible moment. The motion, Government Motion 13, section 4, was passed quite some time ago, and in fact the opposition has gone so far as to have designated the departments pursuant to Standing Order 58(4) in order to comply with that. So on the face of it I don't believe that this has been raised certainly very early in the process.

Nevertheless, leaving that aside, precedent from 1996, the only recent year subcommittees have been used, shows that the designated department must fall to a subcommittee during the six days of subcommittees if a motion has been passed by the Committee of Supply establishing that six-day subcommittee consideration. More importantly, the Committee of Supply, mentioned in 58(1), is the master of its own committee destiny, and if it has decided that it will divide for a period of time into two subcommittees, then designation during that time must fall to a subcommittee. Mr. Chairman, it can't fall anywhere else because there is nowhere else for it to fall. Committee of Supply of the whole Assembly for main estimates consideration does not technically exist at this time for any period longer than to recognize that it must obey the motion and split into subcommittees. Thus the Committee of Supply couldn't gather in the whole Assembly to address a designated department under main estimates simply because it can't. The whole Assembly of the Committee of Supply for main estimates consideration cannot be constituted during the six days. That was the intent of certainly section 4 of Government Motion 13.

Now, that motion, Mr. Chairman, was properly passed in accordance with Standing Order 57(1). In addition, for Standing Order 57 to function in this instance, the only reasonable interpretation of the term "the committee" in Standing Order 58(4) is for

such designation to be made to one of the subcommittees. Otherwise, through an indirect route the purpose and intent of Standing Order 57(1) can be undermined by Standing Order 58(4) and the designation of a department pursuant thereto.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I do believe that the process is entirely appropriate. I do regret that the opposition continues to attempt to stifle what I think is a very good process. We've demonstrated in the past that actually once we get into this process, more time is spent debating the estimates than with the old process.

I guess I'll conclude with that. Let's simply get into the subcommittees so we can be doing what the electorate would like us to do.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen on a point of order citing *Beauchesne* 321 for early notice and the apparent conflict between Standing Orders 57(1) and 58(4). Both the hon. Government House Leader and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora have talked about the process last year and whether it is or is not a precedent.

The Chair is not prepared to rule on it at this time. We'll defer it, and we'll consult with the Speaker. A ruling will be forthcoming at our earliest possible time, which I presume would be Monday, when we will be able to bring forth that ruling. I rule that we will proceed as it is and that this ruling is not in itself a precedent.

I would remind the Committee of Supply that this afternoon we're going to subdivide into two subcommittees. Here in the Assembly the Education estimates will be given consideration under the chair of the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler. Those who are in subcommittee B will deal with the main estimates of the Department of Community Development in room 512, to which those of us who are on that committee will now depart and leave subcommittee A to its deliberations.

[The committee met as subcommittees A and B from 3:29 p.m. to 5:19 p.m.]

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Subcommittee A of the Committee of Supply has under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Education, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

Madam Chairman, I would also like to table copies of the documents tabled during the subcommittee of supply meeting on this day for the official records of the Assembly.

5:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

MR. TANNAS: Madam Chairman, subcommittee B of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolu

tions of the Department of Community Development, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. House leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the departments of Education and Community Development, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table copies of documents tabled during Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 5:24 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]