

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 6, 1997**

Date: 97/05/06

[The Speaker in the Chair]

1:30 p.m.

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Today's prayer was written by former Speaker David Carter.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others.

We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by 15 of my constituents. This petition is in regards to VLTs in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two petitions signed by 201 residents of Wetaskiwin and Camrose regarding VLTs.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1, 2, 3, 9, and 10.

I am also giving notice that tomorrow I'll move that motions for returns stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 4 and 5.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Bill 3

Colleges Amendment Act, 1997

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce the Colleges Amendment Act, 1997.

This Bill would ensure that the Alberta Vocational Colleges, which are soon to be governed by independent boards, will continue to provide programs that assist Albertans to acquire the basic skills.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Leave granted; Bill 3 read a first time]

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 3 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, as promised yesterday, I'm tabling some details related to the Centennial Food Corp. indicating that principal payments have been made and are on schedule. It also shows the amount of the loan and the amount that is left owing and some dates in terms of expiry.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to provide three tablings this afternoon. It's my pleasure to table four copies of the annual report of the inspection of animals under the Universities Act for the year ended March 31, 1996, and four copies of the annual report of the Alberta Cancer Board for the year ended March 31, 1996. I'm also pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses for the year ended September 30, 1996.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As committed to in the House a week previous, I'm tabling four copies of a document describing the stakeholder consultation followed for review and amendment of licensed practical nurses regulation.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table this afternoon copies of a letter from Alderman Dale Hodges, the chairman of the city of Calgary Finance and Budget Committee, and in this correspondence Alderman Hodges makes the assertion that

based on unsubstantiated data and an outdated process, every property owner in Calgary . . . will suffer from an unnecessary Provincially imposed school tax increase.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table 20 pins for the front row of the government bench to remind them of the importance of Dutch elm disease.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, it would be courteous that if the hon. member chooses to table something in the Assembly, one should make those exhibits available to all members of the Assembly.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, we have some.

THE SPEAKER: Fine. We'll do it at a later date.

Hon. members, pursuant to section 44(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, chapter C-22.1 of the 1991 Statutes of Alberta, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner. This report covers the activities of the office of the Ethics Commissioner for the period from April 1, 1996, to March 31, 1997. A copy of the report is being distributed to all members.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a group of Parkland home educators. There are 21 students here and five adults: Mrs.

Margaret Doige, Mrs. Linda Wilkinson, Mrs. Denise Kitlar, Mrs. Deanna Ward, and Mrs. Sherrill Thompson. They've had a great educational tour of the Leg. today. They are here to watch the proceedings. Some of them are from the Member for Stony Plain's riding as well. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and the members of the Legislature a constituent from Calgary-Currie. I know the Member for Calgary-Currie will be surprised by this introduction; she believed her constituent had gone home this morning. I am pleased to introduce Mr. Peter Burgener, who is celebrating his 25th wedding anniversary with the Member for Calgary-Currie, and I ask the Assembly to join me in wishing them a wonderful and happy 25th anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MRS. PAUL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you 56 visitors, students from St. Charles school in my constituency. They are here with two teachers and a helper: Mrs. Zubko and Mrs. D'Amours and Mrs. Hickey. I would love the Assembly to give them the warm welcome of this Assembly. They will be here until about 3 o'clock this afternoon. Please stand. Welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Joey Oberhoffner. Joey is a STEP student in my constituency and a politician in training for the Progressive Conservative Party. Joey is in the public gallery, and I'd ask him to rise and receive a warm welcome from the House.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Two other special guests that I wish to introduce at this point: seated in the gallery behind me I see Peter Lown, the director of the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and accompanying him is Mr. Alan Hunter, a solicitor in the city of Calgary and currently chair of the board of the Alberta Law Reform Institute. I'd invite both of those guests to rise and receive the customary warm welcome of members of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

Health Resource Group Inc.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the Health Resource Group, or HRG, is a for-profit corporation spending millions of dollars to create a private hospital in Calgary. They say that they will provide WCB health care services, yet no agreement has been signed with WCB and the construction continues, a pretty big risk when your market is not known. To the Premier: what promises have been made by the Premier or his Calgary regional health authority that have encouraged all of this money to be spent creating a brand-new private hospital facility?

1:40

MR. KLEIN: There have been no promises, Mr. Speaker, on my

part. If this group in any way, shape, or form violates the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act, it simply will not proceed. Basically this is an arrangement between the Calgary regional health authority and the hospital group to which the hon. member alludes.

I'll have the Minister of Health elaborate.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as indicated previously in this Assembly, the minister and Alberta Health had an undertaking to review the business prospectus or plan of this firm, particularly with attention being given to its adherence to the principles of the Canada Health Act. Our review indicates that this overall plan does adhere to those principles. I would like to go on further to state that we are certainly monitoring the situation closely because we want to make sure that any health care operation in this province conforms to those overall national principles.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier commit that he will not allow public health care services to be contracted out to this private hospital facility?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can simply repeat what I said in answer to the previous question: if there is anything that violates the principles of the Canada Health Act, we simply will not allow it to happen.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, why did the Premier allow the Grace hospital, the Holy Cross hospital, and the Calgary General hospital to be closed in the first place when clearly there is enough demand for more hospital space in Calgary or HRG wouldn't be building it?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the leader of the Liberal opposition sit down with the Calgary regional health authority and go through with that authority their pathway to health. I think they have done a remarkable job in the city of Calgary to open beds in hospitals that are state-of-the-art facilities – the Rockyview, the Peter Lougheed hospital – to move the old Grace hospital to a first-class institution, the women's centre at Foothills. They have done a remarkable job in the city of Calgary to first of all rationalize health care and to rationalize the use of facilities and still maintain a quality system.

Again, I will have the hon. Minister of Health elaborate.

MR. JONSON: Perhaps just to add two, I think, relevant points, Mr. Speaker. One is that the important thing in terms of health care planning in Calgary or anywhere else for that matter is that the treatment capacity of the regional health authority in its hospitals be adequate. In the case of Calgary this is being done. The number of available beds when the restructuring or replanning is complete will be increased. The capacity of operating rooms will be increased. That is the important thing in terms of service to the people of Calgary.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there were no interjections from hon. members when the Leader of the Official Opposition raised his question. I sincerely hope the same courtesy will be expressed and extended when the hon. the Premier responds to the question directed to him.

CKUA Radio

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the lack of accountability, ineffective monitoring, and the absence of financial controls are

mentioned prominently in the Auditor General's report on CKUA. This is the same litany of deficiencies mentioned in previous Auditor General's reports on such disasters as NovAtel, Gainers, and Swan Hills. To the Premier: why after all the previous warnings were there not effective monitoring, accountability, and financial controls in place to prevent the misuse of the \$4.7 million given to the CKUA government politically appointed board?

MR. KLEIN: Well, in reviewing *Hansard*, I think that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs replied to this question yesterday. Mr. Speaker, I can advise the Assembly today that Executive Council has endorsed a recommendation from the Minister of Municipal Affairs to conduct a forensic audit into this situation to get to the bottom of it and indeed have the proper authorities determine if in fact there was any wrongdoing.

MR. MITCHELL: Could the Premier explain, or does he understand that this kind of after-the-fact, once-the-barn-door-has-been-closed review never would have been necessary had his government not defeated the Liberals' Bill 205 two years ago, which would have put in place monitoring procedures within privatization agreements to ensure that appropriate performance standards were being met? We wouldn't have lost the money that he can't get back now, Mr. Speaker.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the radio station is back on the air. It's a privately sponsored board . . .

MR. SAPERS: Show us the money.

MR. KLEIN: Well, I'll show you the money. There's \$800,000 in assets that are still there; it's still running.

Mr. Speaker, I do hope that the board will be very successful in conducting a fund-raising campaign and putting in the kind of programming that will indeed garner an audience for CKUA. You know, one of the problems with the radio station was that there were very few listeners. I hate to say it, but it was a problem.

Now, I can say that many, many years ago I listened to CKUA all the time. At the time I had one of those twist dials in my old Rambler. My young son put it right to the end. It snapped back and got stuck on CKUA, so I had to listen to it. It's not a bad radio station, and I encourage people to listen to it, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: How many fiascos does it take before the Premier realizes that patronage appointments like CKUA, like NovAtel, for example, long before it, Mr. Speaker, all too often lead to the loss of taxpayers' money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge none of the appointments to the CKUA board were done through order in council. There was a process of appointments, as I understand, that occurred through the former Access board, but relative to the specifics and the details I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, with pleasure I do respond. First of all, it's interesting that when the detail of the business plan and the sales agreement was tabled in this House by the previous Minister of Municipal Affairs, not one question was raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition or any other member.

On one other point, if I may, adding to the information

requested, those members appointed one to the other from the board, so the board itself made appointments to CKUA.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Duly noted.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the Auditor General is forced to sort through a financial mess caused by this government, and once again Albertans are witness to a shameful example of this government's patronage, extravagance, and mismanagement. Albertans thought that CKUA was managed by the friends of CKUA, but as it turns out, it was the friends of the Tories who ran that station into the ground. To the Minister of Community Development: will you now halt the outsourcing of the Jubilees and other cultural assets to your friends-of groups?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I do hope that the hon. member is not calling into question the members of those organizations as to their abilities. We have found with experience that in communities community members are well qualified and do a very good job of operating certain aspects of our organizations. So, no, Mr. Speaker. However, I will assure the hon. member that there will be a careful monitoring and auditing of the operations – certainly the organizations at a community level are in full agreement with that – to ensure that the important historic sites and cultural buildings in this province are maintained for the future of all Albertans.

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if I may, just to supplement. I indicated that none of the appointments to the CKUA board were by OC, but they were by order in council to the Access board.

Relative to the hon. member's question and going through the Access board, I see Ina Storeshaw. I have no idea who Ina Storeshaw is. I know Nancy Southern, a fine, fine, remarkable young woman. I know Stan Sparling, a great broadcaster. I don't know Roger Palmer. I don't know Steve Andrais. I don't know Gary Boddez. I don't know Estelle Botfield. I know Jack Davis, just a fine, very dedicated public service employee, a deputy minister. I don't know Joseph Forsyth. I don't know Neil Henry. I know Gail Hinchliffe. One, right? I don't know Fred Kalmacoff, James Frederick, Robert Leitch, Randall Lennon. I know Gerry Luciani because he used to work at the same radio station I worked at many, many years ago; he was the accountant there. I don't know Annette Nelson. Roger Palmer I don't know. Ernest Parr I don't know. Mr. Speaker, I just don't know who all these friends and relatives are.

THE SPEAKER: We're on the first supplemental for the third main opposition question, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same Minister of Community Development: will you at least guarantee that the people appointed to your friends-of groups will be qualified beyond the size and frequency of their donations to the Tory party?

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I hardly feel that that

dignifies an answer. However, I will remind the hon. member that there is a process, and if she were well informed, she would know that. Before questionable comments about the credibility of fine citizens in this province are called in this House, I would recommend, if I might be so bold, that she do that research.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. My third question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will you reimburse the current CKUA Radio Foundation for the money that was wasted on the salary and expenses of your Tory friends who sat on that board?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to get a question. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to supply the opposition with the information that today we have ordered a forensic audit of the actual detailed records of CKUA. We are hoping, therefore, to verify documents associated with the director's expense claims, details of the expense claims of all members. Certainly the records of Access during the negotiation of sale, the business plan, and sales agreement will be reviewed and a thorough investigation of all contracts that the directors administered.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs said that the fiasco involving the former CKUA Radio Foundation had nothing to do with the hasty privatization orchestrated in 1984 by the member who is now the Minister of Energy. Considering that CKUA continued to be owned by the province, its books would have been audited by the very person who provided that damning report yesterday. How can the minister possibly justify that statement?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I have just outlined a process for a forensic review of all the records. I think that when that information is forthcoming, we will be able to provide a detailed response. It's my hope that the time lines will be abbreviated enough so that by the end of June we'll have a full and complete report. I spoke with Mr. Clark Sullivan today, the senior vice-president of Deloitte & Touche, financial investigative branch, and when that detail becomes available, we'll table it in the House.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I think the Auditor General's report is sufficient to sustain what I'm about to ask the minister, and that is: will she initiate legal action immediately, before people have time to go and shelter themselves under bankruptcies, to recover the money that was wrongfully used by those people?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I think in the normal process – and my friend the Justice minister can comment – it's prudent for me as Minister of Municipal Affairs to get all of the information before I recommend such action.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, a former broadcaster and one who got stuck listening to CKUA, 580 on your AM dial. Will the Premier now commit to a \$1 million a year funding program so that Alberta's, North America's most valuable record collection can be properly protected and sustained for the duration of the station?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I understand that a new board is now in place. My understanding is that this board is very, very committed to CKUA and the standards of broadcasting that the listeners have become accustomed to. I'm sure that Mr. Banks and company will do their darndest to make sure that that wonderful record collection is preserved for all time.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today speaking with Mr. Bud Steen, he has confirmed that what the Premier has said is the case. They will in fact address that concern.

Municipal Taxation

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. A number of seniors in Calgary have been calling me because they're concerned they may face an increase in property taxes because their property values are going up. Is this true?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, our tax system is based on the wealth of property. In Calgary in fact in an article today, "Housing market booming," it states that the increases are really quite unprecedented, and in fact the market's going mad, very strong, says Jim Ross, past president. If your property values go up, your taxes go up; if they go down, your taxes go down.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is the province's move to an assessment system based on market value causing tax increases?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, first of all, actual tax increases are imposed by the municipality. Municipal Affairs at the request of the provincial Education minister defines an amount of money to cover the bill for education, and the mill rate this year for education was lowered. However, in looking at market values, five of the provinces of Canada have moved to market values as a belief that we have that those areas of market value assessment are more easily understood by the public. Courts have ruled that they are the most responsible method of assessment. Through the work of the Municipal Statutes Review Committee as well as the Alberta Tax Reform Commission this recommendation came forward in 1994, and through the past three years we've been moving in that direction: for market value assessment.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is there anything that can be done to soften the burden of tax increases for seniors who own property that has increased in value?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there is discretionary power in the Municipal Government Act should a municipality choose to take any area of their assessment, any properties, and value them somewhat less for the purposes of taxation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

2:00 Credit Counselling Services of Alberta Ltd.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are still many unanswered questions regarding the establishment of Credit Counselling Services of Alberta. A board composed of volunteers from London, Ontario, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver has been handed a \$1 million contract from this government to provide debt counseling services with no track record, no tendering process, and no legislation in place. People who have contacted these new offices are finding out that there's no face-to-face debt counseling and there's a \$20 user fee. It's starting to sound a lot like CKUA. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Will the minister finally table the tendering documents for this \$1 million service?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat surprised at the questions relative to the consumer debt repayment program. For over two years the Department of Municipal Affairs in consultation with many people from the private sector put forward a number of proposals and discussed the orderly repayment of debt and also the Credit Counselling Services. This foundation, a nonprofit foundation who has taken over this particular program, is composed of people from the Alberta Home Economics Association, Alberta Treasury Branches, KPMG Peat Marwick Thorne, the Bank of Montreal, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the Hudson's Bay Company, Municipal Affairs, and Grant MacEwan Community College. As I've stated previously, the mandate of this group is to become self-sufficient, and the start-up funding of \$1 million declines to a point of about \$212,000 four years hence. So this will be funded by creditors, and in the initial instance it's taking over a government core business and privatizing it, a responsible thing to do.

MS LEIBOVICI: In order to avoid another CKUA fiasco and to be responsible, will the minister table in the House today the business plan and revenue projections for this program?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to provide any further documentation on the Credit Counselling Services of Alberta. Those are documents that I didn't anticipate today in the excitement I've had.

MS LEIBOVICI: While the minister is tabling those documents, will she also provide information on the qualifications of the volunteer board and any associations that those individuals might have with the Conservative Party?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the comments previously made here today about Albertans who have come forward and have provided their services and who are credible individuals. I would certainly assume that the member of the opposition is not suggesting that any of these particular people that I have identified, their institution, are inappropriate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

Physiotherapy

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the past several months I've received numerous complaints about access to physiotherapy by residents of the Airdrie-Rocky View constituency. Many are being told that they'll have to wait at least six weeks for therapy unless they are willing to pay for it themselves or are on workers' compensation. Their other option is to drive around Calgary to the various clinics there and see if there's enough CRHA money left to help them. My question to the Minister of Health is: what is government policy on this issue?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, during the establishment of the regional health authorities and the initial allocation of funding the funding that was formerly designated specifically to physiotherapy was put into the community rehabilitation program, which includes, of course, as its primary component physiotherapy, and this money became part of the regional health authority budgets. Subsequent to that we have put in place the new population needs-based funding formula. I think that's the base from which we must understand the current system.

There is a prioritization system, a criteria system for establishing the access to physiotherapy services. In terms of the highest needs individuals or patients they have first access to the system, and then we move from there to the lower priorities. The overall program is in the hands of the regional health authority, Mr. Speaker, and I would invite and would certainly try to assist the hon. member in contacting and receiving answers on this from the regional health authority.

MS HALEY: I appreciate that, Mr. Minister, but could you please explain what should be happening when a doctor and a referring specialist indicate to a person that they require physiotherapy but when they go to the physiotherapist, they're told they have to wait at least six weeks?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the way the system is designed and the way the system is planned to work, there is, as I've said, an assessment procedure for people recommended by physicians. There is, yes, a rank in priority set in terms of the need of these prospective clients. Funding is allocated, of course, to the highest priority individuals and in descending order to those in less immediate need of this particular treatment. Of course there is also access to physiotherapists operating on a private basis.

In terms of the specific policies at the moment of the regional health authority in Calgary, I have undertaken to involve myself in assisting the hon. member to find out further answers on this.

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

North Saskatchewan River Boat Ltd.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Treasury Branches gave a \$947,000 loan to the North Saskatchewan River Boat company, and the government of Alberta guaranteed that loan. A judgment by the Federal Court of Appeal in January of 1997 indicates that according to the credit manager of the Strathcona Treasury Branch, the Alberta Treasury Branches really gave this loan almost exclusively on the basis of the government's loan guarantee and that once this guarantee was in place, in fact, Treasury Branches had little or no interest in the business of what was being built. I would like to table with the Assembly four copies of the loan agreement between Treasury Branches and the North Saskatchewan River Boat and the January 20, '97, decision of the Federal Court of Appeal. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. How can the Treasurer claim that transactions between the government and Treasury Branches are truly arm's length when one of the conditions in this loan agreement just tabled states that this guarantee is "a guarantee of the Indebtedness of the Borrower to the ATB, issued by the Government of . . . Alberta"? How is that arm's length?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, as Treasurer I've been asked: how can the Treasurer say? I can say clearly and emphatically as Treasurer: I do not get involved and this government does not get involved with these types of loans. Period.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: The loan agreement reads differently, Mr. Treasurer.

However, given that Treasury Branches gave three loan advances to the boat company in 1993 for a total of \$526,788, what monitoring did the government do as the loan guarantor to ensure that proper ATB lending practices were being followed?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, as I recall the history of this particular enterprise, if we can call it that, in which the city of Edmonton was also involved as I understand it, in which Alberta tourism dollars were designated in some way to this operation – there were a number of partners with it. I will say again that as Treasurer I do not get involved and I will not be involved in any way, shape, or form with any kind of influence on loans that the ATB is making, and that's final.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, given that two court judgments have now concluded and disallowed Treasury Branch claims to the \$800,000 arising out of the boat's sale proceeds and since there are over \$100,000 in escalating legal fees racked up by the Treasury Branches so far, perhaps the Treasurer could confirm that taxpayers are now on the hook for over \$1 million as a result of this government guarantee.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the details that I'm aware of on this particular loan show very clearly that this is a case of a boat up a creek without a paddle. Right from the start there were problems with this as I followed the history of it through the faithful reporting of the media and through other sources. I can say again – and I don't know how many times I have to repeat it – that as Treasurer I do not get involved in granting or refusing loans made by or through the ATB, and that's final.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

2:10 Workers' Compensation Board

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year WCB claimed that an independent survey conducted quarterly by Criterion Research showed that 89 percent of the injured workers were happy with WCB. However, later on Criterion Research admitted that the list of who to survey was prepared by WCB. Furthermore, despite my repeated requests before the last election, WCB still has not provided the content of this survey. My question today is to the hon. minister responsible for WCB. Is WCB ready to release the content of this survey now that the election is over?

MR. SMITH: Yes, it is Mr. Speaker. In fact the results of the 1996 survey are out, and there was a news release today. It shows that 79 percent of injured workers are satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experience. This is up from 65 percent in 1992. The overall satisfaction with case adjudicators is up to 80 percent. I'd be please to table four copies of the news release from the WCB, an arm's-length, employer-funded, employee- and employer-governed organization.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, hon. minister.

My next question is to the same minister again. Why did it take so long for WCB to comply with this request for information given that it was raised more than 15 months ago?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the information was made public to me during the election. People had things on their minds at that time. I can think of 63 things on their minds. As part of the process they released the 1996 results, and that's why I'm pleased to table that today.

MR. PHAM: My last question is to the same minister. Is the list of who to survey still prepared by WCB today?

MR. SMITH: That's a good question, Mr. Speaker, because I heard in some of the catcalls, whatever, from the other side the word "subjective." In fact, 1,600 workers were surveyed, so 400 in each quarter. They provide the research firm with access to the population of injured clients, but I want to assure the hon. member that survey participants are now randomly selected.

Mr. Speaker, you noticed that thing in my hand, and you probably thought I was reading the answer. Well, in fact I wasn't. I was actually being prepared to table that very survey that the WCB uses to consult on its job satisfaction rate. I'm pleased to table that today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Greenfield Plastics Inc.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today will pertain to what the Provincial Treasurer likes to refer to as to taxpayers' sweat-soaked loonies, and I'm talking 9 million of them. Greenfield Plastics received a mortgage pretty close to that amount from the most unusual of banking sources: the Alberta Liquor Control Board. They got that when they acquired the site back in 1994 in that sweetheart deal with \$10,000 down. Now we learn that Greenfield Plastics is two years and almost \$345,000 behind in its property taxes and that they've lost the bulk of their plastics equipment. My question is to the minister responsible for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. What can the minister report to taxpayers about the status of this \$9 million mortgage? How much has been repaid?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I am limited in what I can say because there have been some procedures already put in place on this application. However, I am able to say that the Gaming and Liquor Commission is on top of this. This involves the move to privatize the warehouse unit that was in Calgary. The property is intact and there is in fact a mortgage that has been in place, and the commission will be reporting back as they proceed. That's the best I can offer at this point, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, we understand that this plant won't be operational for another six to seven months until new equipment is installed. What agreement has been reached regarding mortgage payments during this period of time?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, let's rest assured that the distribution and warehousing of liquor is in fact taking place at St. Albert today and that there are ample facilities available there to accommodate the requests coming from throughout the province. So I don't think there should be any fear that the warehousing is not taking place, because it is in fact.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my last question: is the minister prepared to advise this House as to what other properties the Alberta Liquor Control Board is holding mortgages on?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I have requested that information, and I will report back to the House when I receive it from the board.

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

Gang-related Crime

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. People in my constituency of Calgary-Fish Creek and, I must say, elsewhere too have expressed concerns to me about the seemingly increased criminal activity of organized criminals across Canada, gangs who are involved in illegal activities including the illicit drug trade, money laundering, contraband alcohol and tobacco, and violent crimes. They are asking me about increased gang-related crimes in Alberta and asking what the province is doing to combat it.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the government of Alberta is committed to building safer communities in this province, and we're keenly aware of the issue of organized crime. The member may be aware that the federal government recently tabled Bill C-95, entitled the organized crime Bill, and that's proposed a new approach to fighting gang-related crime.

Now, we have reviewed that legislation, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to table with the House four copies of a letter which I did send to then Justice Minister Allan Rock. Basically, the position we took is that we feel the police need to be provided with the proper tools in order to combat this level of crime and that a fear of a court challenge – for example, with respect to the Charter – should not prevent us from doing so.

For the members of the House that aren't familiar with this legislation, it does provide for a number of new provisions such as peace bonds. There are new powers of seizure with respect to the proceeds of organized crime. There is access to income tax information by a judge's order, and there is support of police surveillance of gangs. So we think it's a very good piece of legislation. We strongly support it and will be working closely with the law enforcement officers in this province in order to implement it.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: that's all well and good, but as the legislation has yet to become law, can the minister tell me what this government is doing now, especially when compared with the proactive approaches of Quebec and B.C.?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a different situation in Alberta compared to, for example, Quebec and B.C., and I'm thankful for that. Quebec certainly has a very serious problem with respect to biker violence and biker crime. We have not seen a substantial increase in gang-related crime in this province. Nevertheless, we are monitoring it closely, and we are continuing to work with the police in that regard.

So the hon. member is aware, I will be meeting with the chiefs of police in the near future, and the Premier will also be in attendance. We will be discussing this particular issue. The bottom line is that in order to have an effective program and to take on organized crime, we need a comprehensive Alberta strategy, and that's certainly one of the things we're going to be developing with the chiefs of police.

2:20

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. I appreciate that information, Mr. Speaker, but I'm still wondering and would ask the same minister what we are doing specifically to combat youth gangs and youth-gang-related crimes. Is this government committed to eliminating youth gangs?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, no question, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to eliminating youth gangs in this province. There is some question as to whether or not the new federal legislation could actually apply to youth gangs because, if I'm not mistaken, there is an 18-year-old limit in the legislation that was tabled. Nevertheless, we would if we could certainly rely on that legislation.

We also are continuing to again work with the police in local jurisdictions. We are working closely on our young offenders' initiatives to make sure that we're working with the young people so that they don't become involved in gangs and that we can find some useful opportunities for them to spend their time as opposed to being involved in gang-related activities.

It is important to note the ongoing consultation again with the chiefs of police and the chief of K Division, the RCMP. Again, we're going to continue to work with them and try and come up with a provincial strategy to deal not only with biker gangs and advanced organized crime but also with youth gangs.

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

Handicapped Children's Services

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine has this to say to the Minister of Family and Social Services:

As the mother of twin boys who both have handicapped children's services contracts, I am concerned about the proposed funding model for children's services. As I am not a single parent, aboriginal, or low-income family, I do not see my children's needs met with your block funding model.

Her questions are all to the Minister of Family and Social Services. To prevent handicapped children's services being swallowed up in the system, will the minister move HCS out of children's services?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The big factor that has not been put in is that the funding for handicapped children's services, the funding for children's services in general has not been finalized. We are still talking to the people. We are still hearing their input, and I think it would be quite superfluous of me to rule accordingly until we hear the total of what their input is.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Minister, will you agree, then, to include handicapped children's services as a part of services to persons with disabilities? Many people have expressed this concern.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly have heard from the various groups about this issue and we are very cognizant of it, and we are looking at it. There's a lot of people from handicapped children's services who have made their issues known to me.

Perhaps I could have the hon. minister in charge of children's services respond to this as well.

MS CALAHASEN: I'd love to, Mr. Speaker. First of all, that specific area is definitely mandated to Bill 26, the Child and Family Services Authorities Act.

Secondly, no decisions have been made relative to funding. We are looking for people to be able to bring forward some recommendations on the concerns that have been expressed by handi-

capped children's services families. I think it's very important, Mr. Speaker, that they bring forward those concerns so that we can deal with those concerns and deal with that decision once they have brought those concerns forward.

MS CARLSON: Well, here's one of them. The problem is that the funding is discretionary, and we need to know what the minister's going to do to ensure that block funding for families who need support and proactive measures will actually get them the help that they need. It hasn't been addressed anywhere.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The whole issue with the funding formula is that the funding will be there when it's needed. We are looking at it; we are listening to people. For me to stand up here in the Assembly today and say that it will be this or it will be that would completely cause problems with the talks that we have put forward at the moment.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard, we have listened, and we will let you know what we act as.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Computers in Schools

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. Yesterday a partnership with Telus and provincial education organizations to provide Internet training for teachers was announced. A number of other technology announcements have also been made recently. My question is: how are students going to benefit from technology when the skills they really need to have are in literacy and math?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that one of the purposes of education must be to prepare students for life after school, and whether those students go on to the workplace or whether they go on to postsecondary education, technology is a reality. Technology should not be seen, however, as an end in and of itself. It should be seen as a tool to learning, and helping literacy and numeracy skills through the use of technology is important.

One of the concerns that teachers have often raised is with respect to the issue of in-servicing. Although I'm not ordinarily prone to gasconade, I must say that I have to do some bragging about the announcement that was made yesterday in collaboration with Telus Corporation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the announcement that was made with Telus was a partnership that was created between a number of education partners – the Alberta Teachers' Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta Education department, as well as the Alberta School Boards Association, and Telus – to put \$2 million into Internet training for teachers. This program over the next two years will help some 3,200 teachers gain experience and knowledge in the use of the Internet in using it as a teaching tool for students. Of course, students will benefit from that.

The goal is to put a teacher in every school in the province that will have some ability to use the Internet as a teaching tool. I think that is a very, very positive step, something that we should be very proud of and brag about, and I'm not afraid to be a gascon.

MR. JOHNSON: A further question to the Minister of Education:

have we provided enough hardware and Internet access to schools, especially schools in higher needs areas, to make this training program effective?

MR. MAR: Well, the process of providing Internet access and upgrading of hardware is well under way in the province of Alberta. We've made announcements, which the hon. member alluded to earlier, totaling \$65 million in support from the provincial government over a three-year period that will be matched by school boards for a total of \$130 million in hardware. We've also announced, Mr. Speaker, a relaxation of some of the restrictions that have been placed on our funding so that networking and software can also be eligible for that funding.

Also, we did make an announcement with respect to Microsoft. Microsoft, in an unprecedented agreement, Mr. Speaker, has entered into a licensing agreement with the province of Alberta to allow schools to purchase software at discounts of up to 75 percent. This is a tremendous step in the right direction.

MR. JOHNSON: To the Minister of Education: why are we dedicating so much funding to computers when we are hearing complaints about basic education services and funding, when people are complaining about fund-raising for textbooks and other essentials?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we are attempting to prepare our children for the use of technology as a tool for lifelong learning. We have to recognize that education cannot end upon graduation from high school or upon graduation from university. So the use of technology is critical.

With respect to our spending in other areas, we spend close to \$3 billion in the area of education. That goes to instruction; it goes to instructional resources; it goes to capital. Some of it also goes to computers and software, Mr. Speaker. All you have to do is look at workplaces and offices and schools throughout the province of Alberta, and you will see that they are filled with computers, and the ability of students to use those computers upon their graduation is critical.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Peace River Flood

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad to ask this question to the minister of transportation. The floods in Peace River have knocked out more than half the businesses in the downtown area, and it seems doubtful that many will be able to recover. Due to the narrow constraints affecting compensation for businesses, there is a great deal of confusion and worry. To the minister: as the viability of the whole town is affected, will the minister review the constraints to assist the rapid recovery of the town, which serves a wide rural area? You can't even buy kid's clothes and shoes anymore in Peace River.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly our concerns are with the constituents in Peace River. Obviously, we have been quite involved, together with the MLA for Peace River as well as the MLA for Fort McMurray, in seeing that the needs of those communities are looked after as much and as quickly as possible. As a matter of fact, I'm proud to say that there have now been 14 cheques already sent in the mail to help

the Peace River residents as a result of this disaster. There have been some 61 applications that have come forward from the business community in Peace River.

Certainly it is very, very difficult for the community in light of the fact that it does really hamper a major portion of that business community. We had our people in Peace River immediately. We have put together a program. At this stage we are in further consultation with our federal counterpart to see that we can maximize the restructuring of the damage that was done in Peace River as rapidly, as quickly, and as conveniently as is possible.

2:30

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the minister could clear up some confusion that is happening. Would you clarify for example: does it require a 51 percent ownership of a business to qualify, and what happens if a couple shares a business 50-50? That's one of the confusions that's happening up there.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: There is no confusion, Mr. Speaker. The rules are very, very clear. In a case such as that, there simply is not eligibility. This is a federal piece in the formula that has to be discussed. We are involved and we are engaged in discussions with the federal government to see if this particular component of the formula can be changed. I would urge the hon. members across the way, that rather than hassling me, they talk to their federal counterparts and ask them, encourage them to change that particular element so that indeed the people of Peace River can benefit from this.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You provide the regulations for the delivery of the service.

Would the minister please rapidly review the \$100,000 constraint on claims, as the main town mall has no chance of reopening under the current compensation rules?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: A cap is established with every province in Canada. At this stage I would just like to point out that Alberta's cap is \$100,000 as it is in British Columbia. Just this week Manitoba has raised theirs from \$35,000 to \$100,000. Saskatchewan's cap is \$30,000. We are fair with all the other western Canadian provinces.

The point that the hon. member has made is one that is a federal issue, in that if indeed there is a partnership, if you're considered a small business, you are not eligible. We are now engaged in discussion with our federal counterpart on that point.

MRS. SOETAERT: Point of order.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: We have three members' statements today. First of all, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then the hon. Member for Peace River.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

North American Indigenous Games

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From August 3 to 10 over 700 bright, enthusiastic, and talented aboriginal athletes will be representing Alberta at the 1997 North American Indigenous Games in Victoria, B.C. At the luncheon yesterday the ministers of Community Development and Federal and Intergov-

ernmental Affairs presented financial support to assist these athletes and their coaches to travel to Victoria, B.C.

This will be an opportunity for aboriginal youth to participate in international competition, but the games achieve much more than that. They give participants a sense of pride in their heritage and an opportunity to travel, an opportunity to meet new friends and experience the thrill of competition. They also serve to unite Alberta's many aboriginal communities under one provincial banner. The athletes have just completed the provincial play-downs, and they are now preparing themselves mentally and physically for a week of heated competition.

I would also like to commend the Alberta Indigenous Sports Council, which has helped to provide aboriginal youth throughout this province with sport and recreational opportunity. The ability to participate in sports is helping to build confidence and self-esteem, which is so important to the future success of these young, eager athletes.

I am honoured that more than 150 of these young aboriginal athletes are from my constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul. I would like all Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in wishing Team Alberta, including all athletes and coaches, every success possible at these games. I would also like these athletes to know that they have the support and the best wishes of all Albertans. In our eyes, Mr. Speaker, they are all winners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Part-time Workers' Rights

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about the number of women in my constituency who are active in the part-time labour force. Over 18 percent, or nearly one in every five workers, works in a part-time job. Over 70 percent of these part-time workers are women. Many part-time workers work at their jobs for one, two, or several years. They contribute just as much as full-time workers on a per hour basis, but they suffer from double discrimination. Wages are only 75 percent of that of their full-time colleagues, and there are no benefits. Because women represent such a high proportion of the part-time labour force, the low wages and lack of benefits fall disproportionately on them. Part-time workers should be eligible for prorated benefits similar to full-time employees in the same workplace.

All Albertans should feel confident that the employment standards branch is able to provide fair adjudication of disputes. Both employers and employees need to trust a system which has in the past failed to protect even the most basic rights of workers from abuse. Enforcement of employment standards laws must be stepped up, particularly in hours of work, paid overtime, workplace safety, and protection from undue dismissal. All the laws to prevent these acts are already in place. Unfortunately, the laws are only being enforced passively, awaiting a formal complaint from the employee. There must be a campaign to inform employees of their rights.

The nature of work has changed. Employment standards laws require amendments to provide protection to self-employed workers, at-home workers, and part-time workers. The changing nature of the economy suggests that in the future more and more people will take this route of employment. We should act now to ensure that they have rights such as salaried and wage employees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Peace River Disaster Fund

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the past three weeks there's been a lot of focus on flood disasters that have occurred in various parts of the United States and Canada, not the least of which has affected communities in northern Alberta. I find it always heartwarming to note the degree to which people open their hearts and their wallets to their neighbours and even to strangers when disasters like this strike.

The media has rightly given credit to the donations – time, materials, and money – that Albertans have made to help out in Manitoba. However, I would like to take a few moments to pay tribute to an initiative that has taken place in the Peace River area, and although it has not caught the same media attention, it is every bit as critical to small businesses in that town.

At the initial prompting of the owners of many diversified forest products, several local businesses set up the beginning of a fund which is being used to help small businesses devastated by the flood in Peace River get up and running again. Even though the federal and provincial governments will be providing financial flood relief, there are some losses that are not covered, and without some special help a number of the affected businesses will not likely recover.

2:40

The initial fund immediately reached \$350,000 and is growing rapidly thanks to significant individual donations of \$100,000, \$150,000, and several of \$25,000. What makes these amounts even more remarkable is that several of the principals of these companies have interests in more than one of the donor companies, so they actually are contributing twice. Manning Diversified Forest Products, Daishowa-Marubeni International Limited, Boucher Bros. Lumber Ltd., Decon Construction Ltd., Freson Market Ltd., and Kaufmann Pacific have demonstrated, in my opinion, an example of corporate community citizenship at its best. In fact, one of these companies was itself heavily hit by the flood.

After seeing the utter devastation of the flood and dealing with the hurt and fears of many of the victims, I cannot tell you how proud I am of the people who initiated the Peace River disaster fund and those unnamed individuals and businesses who subsequently donated to it. I appreciate the opportunity to express my thoughts in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: We have four points of order today. First of all, one from the Official Opposition House Leader, then two from the Government House Leader, and then the fourth one is from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

The Official Opposition House Leader.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It was only one today, although I was tempted to rise about the Minister of Education's ministerial statement in response to the question from Wetaskiwin-Camrose. But I didn't.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

MR. SAPERS: The point of order that I am wanting you to advise the House on today, Mr. Speaker, really flows from two rulings yesterday: first, on a point of order raised by the Leader of the

Official Opposition and then a point of order that was raised by the Government House Leader. Both referred to members in the House and what they or may or may not have done, in which you cautioned members of this Assembly that the purpose of question period really is not to reflect on the individual actions of members of the Assembly.

In a supplementary response to a question put by the Leader of the Official Opposition about the CKUA debacle, the Minister of Municipal Affairs ventured an opinion that no member of the Official Opposition had made a comment on the business plan of CKUA. First of all, that's not true, Mr. Speaker, and second of all, in my understanding, it would violate your very fresh and recent ruling of just yesterday in this House. I would appreciate your comment on that.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, my comments yesterday had to do with a comment made by one hon. member about action or inaction in a committee that had not yet reported to the House. I pointed out yesterday that it would be inappropriate for hon. members to make comments about action or inaction of an hon. member until that committee had reported to the House.

Now, the hon. member today raises a point of order and basically refers to something that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs said. I'm quoting from the Blues now:

First of all, it's interesting that when the detail of the business plan and the sales agreement was tabled in this House by the previous Minister of Municipal Affairs, not one question was raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition or any other member.

It's on that point that I gather the hon. member would raise the point. Well, that had nothing to do with committee. But as importantly, if I just go up to the top of the page in the Blues today, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in a question said:

Could the Premier explain, or does he understand that this kind of after the fact, once the barn door has been closed review never would have been necessary had his government not defeated the Liberals' Bill 205 two years ago?

So in essence, hon. member, if the Minister of Municipal Affairs is to be ruled out of order on this point, then obviously the Leader of the Official Opposition must also be ruled out on this point.

The ruling yesterday had to do with comments made in a committee that had not yet reported to the House. I suspect that my explanation is clear today, and one should, hopefully, gain something from that.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suggest that the House leader for the opposition sign up with the New York Mets. His batting average is so bad.

Point of Order

Allegations against Nonmembers

MR. HAVELOCK: Nevertheless, I'm rising with respect to Standing Orders 23(i) and (j) and *Beauchesne* 409(7), and these are with respect to comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. She made the comment, if I've managed to get it correctly, that the government is basically appointing individuals to boards on the basis of the size and frequency of their donations to the PC Party. You have indicated in the past, in fact I think as recently as yesterday, that both sides of the House should be tempering their remarks, their responses, and their questions in question period. The Member for Edmonton-Centre unfortunately isn't here to, hopefully, listen to your ruling.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, the use of such language in the House is certainly beneath the dignity of the member and, I think, of all members in here. Its purpose is simply twofold: one, to capture that all-elusive TV sound bite, which the opposition party seems to have some difficulty getting, and secondly, to simply create disorder in the House. If you're going to stand up and ask questions in that manner, then certainly you need to expect to get it back equally as forcefully. I'd like you to certainly indicate to all members of the House and in particular to the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the members of the opposition that such behaviour is not acceptable. It's a clear breach of the Standing Orders and *Beauchesne* that I've outlined, and hopefully you will rule in that regard.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, that was the most spirited defence of a point of order that the Government House Leader has been able to muster so far, and I congratulate him for finally rising to that challenge. It's unfortunate that he chose this particular hill to die on, because that's just what he's done.

Mr. Speaker, it is never a violation of Standing Orders to recite a statement of fact in the Assembly, and all the Member for Edmonton-Centre did of course was make a statement of fact. It is friends of the government in fact that have been appointed to these boards over and over and over again. It is friends of the government in fact that have squandered so much of taxpayers' money and abused that trust, and it was clear to the Auditor General, who made those comments. I would wonder whether or not those friends of the government have given the Premier back his little FORK pin or not.

So clearly, there is no abuse of Standing Orders, there is no abuse of parliamentary debate, and there is no point of order. The question was simply trying to elicit response from the government on a very serious issue, and the question was predicated on the basis of fact.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I challenge . . .

THE SPEAKER: That's fine. It won't be debated. Hon. members have a chance to raise a point of order. The hon. member did. The hon. Opposition House Leader raised a point.

These documents and these books that we use, hon. members, are really interesting reading, if one takes the time to read. First of all, hon. Government House Leader, when you raised the point of order, you indicated the absence of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. May I refer you to *Beauchesne* 481(c), which says that it's inappropriate for an hon. member to mention the absence of an hon. member from the House. I repeat again what a sage member of this House once said to me: it's much easier to talk your way out of this House than it ever is to talk your way into this House.

Now, on the point of order having to do with dealing with one's friends, the Chair listened very attentively to the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and the hon. member did refer in the question to Tory friends. Well, the Speaker has indicated before and certainly all the documents we have in front of us have indicated that such an expression is not an inappropriate or unparliamentary phraseology. We all have friends. We have friends of a variety of stripes. I'm sure that all members do. That certainly is not unparliamentary. The Chair can understand, however, that at certain points during the ebb and flow of the question period and the answer period this might lead to movement

from some hon. members in the Assembly, and it can raise the temperature.

2:50

Again, certainly what I indicated yesterday is something that I would want to repeat again today. I would also want to draw the attention of all members to *Beauchesne* 493(4):

The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply.

That is the point that the Chair would want to make with respect to that point of order at this time. If names of individuals are raised who are not in this House, one has to take great care because those individuals are in no position to defend themselves one way or the other. It would be uncourteous certainly and perhaps unparliamentary as well to deal with that.

Government House Leader, you have another point of order?

MR. HAVELOCK: After that brilliant performance I think I'll withdraw the second one. Thank you.

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

Point of Order Clarification

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. I guess I'd like to clarify something on my last question about small business and large business. My question was about a mall, and the minister answered with regard to small businesses. But with large businesses, that is totally under the minister. Assistance may be provided under unusual circumstances if the minister is satisfied that assistance is warranted. I guess it is the whole issue of federal and provincial, but it does come under large businesses that in special circumstances, if the minister deems it's possible, he can provide that assistance. That was the clarification.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I was flipping through *Beauchesne*, and I wasn't able to find a point about idiocy in here. Nevertheless, that is really what the argument would fall under, quite frankly. The member is simply clarifying a position. It's not a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: I agree, hon. members. I believe that the point raised by the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert was one of clarification rather than a point of order.

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Bill 201

Parenting After Separation Act

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 201, the Parenting After Separation Act.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my hon.

colleague from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for giving up his number one spot in the draw for Bills, which gave me the opportunity to bring this important piece of legislation forward. I want my colleague to know that he and everyone else who had any part in the development of this Bill will be thanked over and over again whenever they read yet another good-news story of families in conflict who have been helped by this legislation.

The principles of Bill 201 have received widespread support from a range of parties inside and outside of this Assembly. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 has the support of separating or divorcing parents who care for the future of their children. They realize the importance of the parenting after separation course and the benefits that this course provides in terms of valuable information on the issues of support, custody, access, and alternative methods of dispute resolution involving their children. They realize that Bill 201 puts the fate of their children in their hands instead of in the hands of the courts.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, parents realize that the parenting after separation course provides information on the importance of both parents playing a continued role in their children's lives before and after divorce, if that indeed happens. The course teaches parents to put their children first and gives them the tools to resolve their disputes in a nonconfrontational manner.

Mr. Speaker, as I made clear in second reading and in committee, the facts are there. Many parents who attend the parenting after separation course do not – I repeat do not – go on to court. They settle their differences by using what they learned in the parenting course, and they are able to come to decisions, always putting their children first. If only one family benefits from this course, it certainly will be worth it all.

I also previously indicated the resounding support the course has received from its participants in their evaluations, many of whom initially did not want to attend the course. They were almost dragged there kicking and screaming. But when they did get into the course, they were very happy indeed that they did attend. The course also has the endorsement of the Court of Queen's Bench and of the government departments involved.

Mr. Speaker, there has been extensive consultation with the Department of Justice, the Department of Family and Social Services, and the courts, including Madam Justice Trussler, in bringing Bill 201 forward. I want to commend Madam Justice Trussler for recognizing a need to help families in conflict and then doing something about it by setting up a very successful pilot project in conjunction with government departments. Now it is poised to go provincewide. I would like to express my sincere thanks for their initiating the framework for the course and thank those who helped put this concept into legal language. We have to give credit where credit is due, Mr. Speaker. An awful lot of work goes into even what appears to be a small piece of legislation.

I would also like to thank all the hon. members that provided ideas for improving the Bill, which was done by way of amendments. We even accepted two opposition amendments. The amendments included in Bill 201 are a culmination of discussions and debates on both sides of this House. Because we listened and we acted, we have a solid piece of legislation that we can all take credit for and all be proud of.

By supporting Bill 201, we are sending a loud and clear message to Albertans that we care about Alberta families and the future of their children. By supporting Bill 201, we are implementing the first legislation of its kind in Canada. The pioneer

spirit, Mr. Speaker, is alive and well right here in Alberta. This is a progressive Bill that will provide the foundation for the parenting after separation course and also will give direction to Alberta's courts, lawyers, and families.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to again thank all hon. members for their interest, their suggestions for change, and their support in second reading and in committee stage. Now we are at the last stage, third reading. The amendments have been added and agreed to, and the Bill is solid. In second reading you gave it approval in principle. In committee you added amendments to make it even better. You then accepted the Bill overwhelmingly: 46 for and only 13 against. Now we need that final stamp of approval to make it law so that it can start helping families in conflict immediately. I know you're going to do that, and I thank you for it.

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

3:00

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have listened intently to the debate on both sides of the House on this Bill, and I see that some improvements have been brought to it. Certainly some of the amendments have strengthened it, like defining exactly what the course does. There's no doubt in this Legislature that we've seen Bills leave the House and then actually be carried out in a fashion that was quite contrary to what was anticipated when it was under discussion in here.

Certainly the amendment that talked about giving the court the discretion in appropriate circumstances to waive fees is an important amendment to have passed, because there's no doubt that for many people fees are a considerable barrier. They would produce a handicap that some people would have never been able to overcome. However, I still have some grave concerns about this Bill. To me, the fact still remains that the course is already available through the judicial practice note and that that system is in fact working quite well. Therefore, I have to question some of the motivation for this Bill.

In listening to some of the previous comments, I see that the mover of this Bill, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, has made what I feel to be some very frivolous comments. In particular, his comment about people resorting to divorce in the heat of the moment is something that's completely unwarranted. I see that the minister of economic development is agreeing with me on this. Having been divorced myself and having many friends who are in that same circumstance, I can tell you that you get divorced with a great deal of heartbreak, I think, on both sides. Certainly the concern for safety of the children is something that's foremost in your mind, and every effort is made towards reconciliation and trying to make the system work. It really was a means of last resort when any of the people that I know have sought divorce action through the court system.

So I'm very concerned that he would sponsor a Bill based on what is a clear misconception, from any knowledge that I have, about the system and about people who have gone through this system in this regard. I think, in fact, what this Bill has done in many cases is deflected our attention away from the very serious issues that do surround separation and divorce. Those, Mr. Speaker, are issues of access, issues of custody, issues of maintenance, and issues of child poverty, that are all related to divorce.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in his comments said that he's looking for stable homes for children. Well, Mr. Speaker, so are we. A loving and caring environment that's free

from poverty has got to be what all of us want for the children, who are the future of this province. You don't address that by sending people who are on the verge of a breakup to a course at that point in their relationship. If this province were serious about doing that, they would address issues of conflict and anger management in families long before they get to the stage where they're talking about separating. Endorsing the position that all Albertans should have access to better than minimum wage jobs and adequate income support as required for those families that are living in poverty or near poverty: I think those are things that we could have addressed.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview said this afternoon that this is an important piece of legislation. To my way of thinking, reading through it and seeing what we could have done, this is nothing more than a piecemeal kind of legislation. If he were truly going to send a loud and clear message to Albertans that they care about Albertans, about families in Alberta, then I think he should have introduced a substantial piece of legislation. In fact, he could have easily dusted off Bill 219 that was introduced in the last session here, a Bill on family law reform, which did address some of the very, very necessary issues that are outstanding for families in this province. Instead what he did was say that he's putting children first, and in fact he hasn't. He's simply set out a course of action for people after they're at the stage of separation, and he hasn't addressed even then some of the outstanding issues that we've discussed in this House about this Bill.

Things like the timing of taking the course haven't been addressed, and there hasn't been substantiation in here that families that are truly in conflict in abusive situations will have security when they go to take that course. He hasn't adequately addressed access to the course either, in particular for rural Albertans, that in fact they will be able to take the course and that it would be the same kind of course that would be offered in the urban centres in this province. I think those are issues that have to be addressed before this Bill can be passed.

So for everything that I have said here today, I cannot in good conscience support this Bill at this time. I look forward to this government member in particular, given his track record in this House concerning families, to bring forward a substantial Bill on family reform.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm rising to speak to the Bill. I want to introduce an amendment in third reading, and that amendment I guess is a hoist amendment. I'd like to move the following:

That the motion for third reading be amended by striking out all the words after "that" and substituting the following: Bill 201, the Parenting After Separation Act, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence.

I'll just pass a copy out to everybody.

The reason that I am choosing to do this is that I've listened to the debate on both sides of this House. I was pleased that the amendments submitted regarding the costs associated and also the parenting information definition were accepted, but I'm concerned that nothing has been put forward on – nor can the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview address – the inequities regarding the delivery of this program. This program can be delivered in a classroom form in the city of Edmonton. It may be delivered in a classroom form in the city of Calgary. But beyond that, it's been suggested that the course be delivered by videotape. Now, I would suggest that if we are spending \$250,000 in two years on

this course and it's going to be delivered by videotape in other areas of the province, then in fact it can be delivered by videotape in Calgary and Edmonton.

I also have some concerns that although amendments to the Bill do not make the Bill mandatory, as it had initially done, I'm concerned that what may happen is that as couples walk into the courtroom, they will all be required to go to this course regardless of the amendment and that they will all have to sit through the course just as a matter of practice through the divorce process.

I also am concerned, given that forms of this course have been offered for a number of years in different variations through different organizations, and I wonder why now it needs to be in legislation. I'm concerned also about the comments made by the sponsor of this Bill. He has numerous times alluded to this as being a reconciliation process; in fact some comments in the newspaper had stated that. In fact, I'm quite concerned because the comments made were regarding the number of people who have reconciled as a result of going to this course. Well, at no time through any of this debate was that ever addressed or spoken to. I do not believe that's the intent of this Bill. I would love to know where that evidence indicating . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'm sorry to interrupt. What we have before the House here is an amendment, and you're now speaking to the amendment. So restrict your remarks to the amendment rather than debating the Bill, if you wouldn't mind. Thank you.

MS OLSEN: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Given the fact that there are a number of issues still outstanding, as I've discussed – the motivation, the inequities in the delivery, the delivery of the program not being set up – I can't support the Bill at this point. I would love to see some further investigation done. I would love to see the hon. member go back and look at the delivery process of other courses and then bring it back to us with some substantial amendments in that regard, look at why it has to be legislated, and also maybe look within his own world and try to make it clear to himself why he's actually putting this Bill forward.

Thank you.

3:10

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to speak briefly to the amendment that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood has just put in front of us. While speaking to some of my constituents, there has been a real concern that this is not the place where government should be, and they kind of resent this Bill as being quite intrusive. I respect their opinion on that.

There are inequities about the delivery of the program that haven't been addressed. In some ways it's an empty Bill, because there isn't enough substantial stuff to it. So I'm of two minds. Why are we bringing it here? The other one is: why are we doing this in people's lives? Stay out of their bedrooms. I would like to see a more comprehensive approach to family law reform, much like Bill 219 brought before us previously by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Why aren't we looking at a comprehensive package like that?

I do support the hoist. I would like the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to have a look at this Bill and maybe make it

more comprehensive or certainly so that it deals more with the courts than just a course that you are foisting upon people, which I find is met with resentment. I just wanted to voice those few concerns that I've heard out in my constituency from people who have been following this. They don't think this is the place for legislation.

With those few words, I'll take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this is an amendment. It's also known as a hoist amendment. It's the last amendment under the rules that we have. All those in favour of the amendment as put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The amendment is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:13 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the Chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Broda	Lund	Pham
Carlson	MacDonald	Sapers
Friedel	Massey	Sloan
Gibbons	Mitchell	Soetaert
Gordon	Nicol	White
Haley	Olsen	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Amery	Hancock	Melchin
Black	Havelock	Oberg
Boutilier	Hierath	O'Neill
Burgener	Hlady	Paszkowski
Calahasen	Jacques	Renner
Cao	Johnson	Severtson
Cardinal	Jonson	Smith
Coutts	Klapstein	Stelmach
Day	Kryczka	Stevens
Dickson	Laing	Tannas
Ducharme	Langevin	Tarchuk
Dunford	Lougheed	Thurber
Fischer	Marz	Trynchy
Forsyth	McClellan	West
Fritz	McFarland	Yankowsky
Graham		

Totals	For - 21	Against - 46
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[Motion on amendment lost]

THE SPEAKER: All those in favour of third reading of Bill 201, Parenting After Separation Act, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:29 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the Chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Fritz	Marz
Boutilier	Graham	McClellan
Burgener	Hancock	Nicol
Calahasen	Jacques	O'Neill
Cao	Johnson	Paszkowski
Cardinal	Klapstein	Renner
Day	Kryczka	Severtson
Dickson	Laing	Stevens
Ducharme	Langevin	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Lougheed	Yankowsky

3:40

Against the motion:

Barrett	Havelock	Olsen
Black	Hierath	Pannu
Blakeman	Hlady	Pham
Broda	Jonson	Sapers
Carlson	Leibovici	Sloan
Coutts	Lund	Smith
Dunford	MacDonald	Soetaert
Fischer	Massey	Thurber
Friedel	McFarland	Trynchy
Gibbons	Melchin	West
Gordon	Mitchell	White
Haley		

Totals:	For - 30	Against - 34
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[Motion lost]

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Highway 2 Marker Signs

502. Mrs. Gordon moved:

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

[Debate adjourned April 29: Mr. Coutts speaking]

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have completed my remarks on Motion 502 and ask for support.

MR. MacDONALD: I would like to say a few words regarding Motion 502 as it was introduced by the Member for Lacombe-

Stettler. I agree with the concept of markers along Highway 2. If you were to drive down the highway early, early in the morning, particularly whenever it's foggy, ice fog in the winter, it is a very, very good idea to have markers there. There is a long stretch of road. You have the Bear Hills restaurant and truck stop. Perhaps we could have a call box on one side to the south of the Bear Hills truck stop and one to the north as well as the markers, but the markers are a sound idea because of the weather conditions in the winter. The place that I find the most hazardous is between Bear Hills and Leduc. There can be whiteout conditions. The Lacombe Chamber of Commerce, I understand, was responsible first for this idea. I would like to commend them on this.

If you travel in the winter in this province, you will see why it is necessary that we have these markers. The markers, I understand, are to be at two-kilometre intervals – is that correct? Yes, two-kilometre intervals – and these are to be installed very, very soon. If you go all through the province in the winter, you will understand the hazards of driving. We've got weather conditions, black ice. You've had privatization of the roads, and this privatization of the roads has led to deteriorating driving conditions. It is a hazard. These markers would enhance public safety.

If we had any more road markers, I think we could also perhaps adapt this program and put it forward from Lloydminster. You go through a lot of double-laned highway to Edmonton, very similar to Highway 2. To the west of the city, going north, the highway markers would also be a sound idea between Fox Creek and Whitecourt. We had a tragic bus accident between Fox Creek and Whitecourt. Perhaps for the emergency response teams – the police, the fire department, the tow trucks – this sort of system would have been advantageous in the rescue and the following investigation of that tragic accident. If you go north from Fox Creek through to Valleyview and then on to Grande Prairie, there are many places – crossing the Smoky River, for instance – where these markers would also be a help to public safety.

If you go east of Red Deer out the Consort-Provost way – I've worked there, Mr. Speaker, in the winter, and sometimes we've had to, as we refer to it in the oil patch, go to town before dark because the whiteout is so extreme that you cannot see in front of you. The hon. members perhaps could consider using these markers out toward Wainwright, Provost, Consort. Referring to a former Conservative Prime Minister of this country, Mr. Diefenbaker used to talk about his horse and his sleigh and experiencing whiteouts in Prince Albert and North Battleford when he was a young lawyer. These whiteouts are just as extreme east of Red Deer. You cannot get to town safely after dark. If the snow is blowing across the road, you can't see from here to the Speaker's Chair. These markers are a sound idea in that part of the province as well as on Highway 2.

Now, if you go west of Red Deer, we're getting out toward Rimbey, Sylvan Lake, over toward Rocky Mountain House. We're getting into the foothills. There are extreme weather conditions there as well. There's a lot of economic activity going on as a result of the Caroline gas plant, the sulphur extraction to the south of the Caroline gas plant.

MR. DICKSON: The youth correctional facility.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, the youth correctional camp for young offenders. There are many farms, many ranches out toward Manyberries, and there are a lot of large trucks. There are a lot of large trucks moving oil field products, and they could also be a beneficiary of these markers.

However, getting back to the north country and the transporta-

tion of goods, this Motion 502 could also be used going north from Grande Prairie to High Level. In the winter there are extreme driving conditions there. There is a lot of traffic. We could use this system to help truckers move the goods, which are very, very important to the economic well-being of this province.

We talked earlier about call boxes. Call boxes, I suppose, would be very expensive to provide to the motoring public, but they are necessary. Not all of us can use cellular phones. There are a lot of women who are now active in the workplace and are traveling about on the highways of this province. The idea of call boxes throughout the province is a good idea.

These comments on Motion 502, Mr. Speaker, I hope are listened to by all members of this Assembly. I thank you for your time.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To all those that have been before the Assembly talking in support of Motion 502, I thank you. I'm very pleased today that it's finally here. I looked back, and it was May 11, 1995, when the mayor of Lacombe sent me a letter requesting that I take the lead role on this. I also thank those that have talked to me outside of the Assembly on this motion. I think there have been some excellent suggestions and ideas. Possibly what we should consider besides just kilometre signs, if this motion were indeed to pass and we could urge the hon. minister and his department to go through with this, is to look as well at mileage signs in conjunction with the kilometre markings. Many of the tourists that come to Alberta come from Stateside, and of course they're still working in miles.

3:50

Another excellent suggestion that just came my way is that maybe we should look at some consistency with this and tie it in with township, TWP, and range road marker signs. In many counties they are identified, and this is certainly a very plausible suggestion and something that could be worked on so there isn't duplication and overlap.

So with that, members of the Assembly, I thank you for your support and urge you to consider the vote on this motion. I would move, Mr. Speaker, that the question now be put.

[Motion carried]

Medicare Protection Legislation

503. Ms Barrett moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a medicare protection Act which enshrines in legislation the five principles of the Canada Health Act, ensures that all medically necessary services continue to be funded solely through public health care insurance, and prohibits within Alberta the provision of medically necessary services for which a fee is charged to the patient or to a nonpublic insurer.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, the essence of this motion is to prevent the Americanization of health care in Canada, not just Alberta. I plan to give you a litany of reasons to support this motion. The government of Alberta is currently entertaining the notion of allowing a private, for-profit hospital to be constructed in Calgary in what used to be a public health care facility known as the Grace hospital. There was an attempt last year by a group

of people known as the Hotel de Health people to undertake a similar project in the city of Leduc. Fortunately, its citizens stood up and said: "No way. We don't want this. We know what's going to happen is that with the introduction of private, for-profit hospitals that will be the thin edge of the wedge. It will initiate two-tiered health care immediately, and in the long run an unfortunate competition would be set up between the two systems: the private, for-profit and the public health care system."

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

Now, Mr. Speaker – no, Madam Speaker. I'm not used to that. Congratulations. In the time that I served in the Assembly, from '86 to 1993, there was never a Deputy Speaker who was a woman, and it's a real pleasure to say Madam Speaker.

I'd like to relate to you, Madam Speaker, what happened in the United Kingdom, and then I will describe why I think the operators of private, for-profit health care are just a bunch of chickens, to put it in plain, plain language. I lived in Britain when the dismantling of health care took place under the so-called stewardship of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. I will never use the word "honourable" in front of her name because of what she allowed. Hitherto, as in Canada, if you wanted to go and see a private, for-profit clinic for anything, all you had to do was go to Harley Street. Okay? But those people had the courage of their convictions to not double-dip. They were totally outside of the public health care system. If they were going to operate on Harley Street, they were going to do it for cash transactions and that was it, and they had no participation in the public health care system.

Well, under Margaret Thatcher all that changed, because what she started to do was say: well, you see how many people are using the private, for-profit system; that's proof that we can now start to underfund our public system. She started cutting the public system. It was just a little creeping menace that happened, and it all happened within two years. Then what happened is the doctors in the public system said: hey; you know, I can make a little more money if I take on some private clients on the side. So they started doing that. The regulations were changed to allow them to do that.

So what you have is doctors working in the public system for, you know, let's say three days a week and then working in the private, for-profit system for two days a week. The not very honourable brother of my almost ex-husband, I'm pleased to say, himself confessed to me that he was crazy not to double-dip, and I started disliking that man that day because of it. All he wanted to do was make more money. He said: if everybody else in the system is doing it, so am I. I found that to be pretty dishonourable.

The result of which is that now you go to Britain and the public system is so underfunded that only the very basest of services is provided to the working class, essentially, and everybody else is forced to go into the private, for-profit health care system if they want their problems attended to in relatively short order. They are forced to. So what you have in Britain is this artificial competition between the public system and the private, for-profit system, and the private, for-profit system is winning, and it is to the detriment of the majority of the Brits.

Now, the provincial government here will tell you that they're not moving towards an American system. Let me tell you, Madam Speaker, that health care in the United States – well, you can't call it a system, number one. There is big, big money to be made,

which is why the Americans are so interested in seeing this development proceed. Big money. The insurance companies make money, and the hospitals make money, and the health care providers make big money, untold profits. In fact, health care in the United States costs 50 percent more than what it costs in Canada because we have what we call a single-payer insurance system and because we do not have private, for-profit activity in our hospital systems.

Also, the insurance on average – if you're in New York, do you know what your monthly health care insurance bill is? In New York, \$945, and I think it's \$900 in Washington. I know this because the United States government, when I was still an MLA in 1992, invited me to go on a study tour of the United States. It looked like a junket, but I'll tell you that after 72 meetings in 19 cities in 21 days, believe me that was no junket. That was a lot of work, but I sure learned about the American health care system firsthand thanks to the United States government. I don't know what they were doing training a New Democrat opposition member on their health care system, but they did it.

MR. RENNER: They thought you were a Democrat.

MS BARRETT: They thought I was a Democrat, yeah. They did a good job of it.

The bottom line is this. I don't believe in double-dipping in the system. The Canada Health Act says that if you want to set up a private, for-profit hospital, you go right ahead, but it prevents double-dipping in the public system, and that's basically what I am opposed to. I believe that they lack the courage of their convictions.

HRG, the Health Resource Group, has even identified in its executive summary of its business plan, tabled by the Health Minister just two weeks ago, that they're going after publicly insured groups of people and individuals. They want contracts from Workers' Compensation, which is bad, bad news. I mean, employers pay these premiums. Their premiums are going to go up. When you get private, for-profit, man, their number one motive is to make extra money. Okay? So those premiums are going to go up. It's bad for all citizens. They also say they're going to go after Albertans, Canadians. They specify in this executive summary that they would like to target native bands and councils, the Canadian armed forces. Gee, I'm going from memory here. I can't remember. They basically want to go after anybody they can for these contracts. Well, shame on them.

All of the people that they're targeting are already covered by the public health care system. There is no need for this. Now, of course, they're saying: you know, we're also going to be looking for those outside travelers, those people who are traveling in the province from outside the country. Well, if they think there's enough business there, go after it, but don't go after our public health care system and the people who pay for it and support it, pay for it and support it handsomely by way of taxes and health care premiums.

I've been quite involved with the health care system lately. My mother has been in and out of hospital, so I know the state of deterioration of our own hospitals. We've lost 50 percent of the beds in Edmonton and Calgary, and believe me, it shows. The last time I used the hospital system things were working, but now you go to emergency and you're in the hall overnight for 36 hours. You're talking to a person with the experience. Okay?

4:00

I believe that HRG and Hotel de Health and everybody else want to exploit that. Quite frankly, Madam Speaker, if I had to get my mother into an emergency service and she had to wait another 36 hours in the hallway, I would say no, and I would pay for her to go to a private, for-profit health care provider. I am fundamentally opposed to it, but I love my mother. I want to make sure that she's getting the best health care that she can. She and I both pay our taxes and our premiums. I can't understand why she can't get service when she needs it. I can't understand why all Albertans who are stuck in those emergency wards can't get service when they need it. But I understand that you love your family. If you were forced to, you would do that even though you're totally, completely opposed to that.

Now, on the subject of my mother, a reporter came up to me today and said: why did you miss the Health estimates yesterday? I said: "Oh, a little crisis at home. Everything blew up. Home care was there. I had to get her to the doctor. I finally got her into 24-hour home care." He turned off his microphone. I said: what caused you to ask that? He said: oh, the Liberals are griping that you weren't there. I thought, you know, this is interesting. If anybody wants to know why I'm not somewhere, all you have to do is ask me. As everybody knows in this place – at least the Conservatives know – with Pam Barrett what you see is what you get. I don't play games. That's true. That is absolutely true. I find it totally cheesy – totally cheesy – that the Liberals would be talking to the reporters about my private life. If any one of them was looking after a dying mother, I wouldn't do that to them.

I'd like to add, Madam Speaker, that the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services wrote me a note last week teasing me about not being available at night. I wrote him back and I said: "That is true. That is absolutely true. I am at home looking after my dying mother." He at least had the good grace to apologize. Yes, he did.

Then I get a note from one Liberal: heard from Raj yesterday that your mom is deteriorating; gee, if I can help, let me know. It's disgusting. They knew.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Could we have the next speaker, please.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to begin debate today on Motion 503, sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. Motion 503 urges the government to enshrine the five principles of the Canada Health Act in a new medicare protection Act, and this to me is a bewilderment. It's a bewilderment because I believe these five principles are already enshrined in federal legislation. The province of Alberta signed the Canada Health Act, and we abide by it. If we were to support this Motion 503, I believe we'd be producing something that duplicates existing legislation. It would be redundant and basically unnecessary.

The principles of public administration, portability, comprehensiveness, universality, and accessibility are already present not only in the Canada Health Act but also in the Regional Health Authorities Act and in the business plans and annual reports of Alberta Health and the regional health authorities. Regional health authorities are required by law to uphold the five principles of the Canada Health Act, just as we are. To clarify the responsibilities of regional authorities, the Act states that the RHAs must "promote and protect the health of the population in the health

region and work towards the prevention of disease and injury." They must "assess on an ongoing basis the health needs of the health region." They must "determine priorities in the provision of health services in the health region and allocate resources accordingly." Furthermore, they must "ensure that reasonable access to quality health services is provided in and through the health region," and finally

promote the provision of health services in a manner that is [both] responsive to the needs of individuals and communities and supports the integration of services and facilities in the health region.

Madam Speaker, these principles are further reinforced in the Ministry of Health's business plan in the business years 1997-1998 through to 1999-2000. The business plan outlines that

- Albertans will have access to quality health care services when they need them . . .
- Control of Alberta's health [care] system will continue to be in the public sector, with leadership by the provincial government, managed by regional health authorities, delivery by health care providers and accountability at every level.
- Albertans will be insured for medical and hospital services. Medically necessary health service will be available to all Albertans without user fees, extra billing or other barriers to reasonable access.

As I've just outlined, Madam Speaker, Alberta Health takes the five principles of the Canada Health Act very seriously. Alberta's health system is publicly administered. The provincial health care insurance plan is administered by the government and is operated on a nonprofit basis. The health services provided by Alberta Health are very comprehensive. Insured health services as defined by the Canada Health Act are provided by hospitals, medical practitioners, dentists and are insured under the Alberta health insurance plan. Medically necessary services are universal, portable, and accessible. They are – I repeat "are" – available to all Alberta and all non Alberta residents. These principles are important to all Albertans, and they are important to this government. They are basically the foundation of Alberta's health care system. In fact, Madam Speaker, we've restructured the health system in Alberta based on these very principles, and they will continue to be a future part of our initiatives, our strategies, and our goals.

In November 1996, Alberta Health announced the Action on Health initiative, which strengthened our commitment to preserving the five principles upon which Canada's medicare system was founded. Actions were taken to address pressure points in the system and to ensure accessibility, quality, and stability in Alberta's publicly funded health care system. The initiatives reduced waiting lists, and I think this is a very important part, Madam Speaker. With due respect to the previous speaker, I understand that when your own personal family is involved, it does become very emotional. But I think that if you step back and look, the waiting lists in actual fact have been reduced for a variety of provincewide services, including heart surgery, kidney dialysis, improved home care and long-term care, and emergency services. There have been some increases in the number of nurses and other frontline staff. As well, the RHAs have provided stable and predictable plans for their employees, and the province in turn has provided predictable funding based on the population-based model.

In addition, a new accountability framework is currently being developed that will clarify the responsibilities of various parts of the health system. This framework will involve a definition of "reasonable access" to ensure that patients receive quality health services in a timely manner. I believe it would be superfluous for

Alberta to enshrine these five principles in provincial legislation when they're already contained in the federal legislation. In addition, it would not begin to reflect our government's commitment to health care in this province.

One important aspect of the Canada Health Act is that it applies only to insured health services. These are defined as hospital services, physician services, and surgical dental services provided to insured persons. The Act does not include all of the health services that a person is eligible for and entitled to in Alberta.

4:10

Madam Speaker, this province is committed, as I stated before, to providing access to a continuum of quality health care services to all Albertans. In addition to hospital and medical services, Alberta provides a range of nonphysician services that many of us tend to forget about, services such as podiatry, optometry, chiropractic, and special dental and optical services for seniors. These basic health services are guaranteed to Albertans under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, not under the Canada Health Act.

With respect to ensuring that all medically necessary services continue to be funded solely through public health insurance, Alberta already provides this. The Alberta health insurance Act is the legislative vehicle that governs the provision of medically required services. The Act states that

the Minister shall . . . administer and operate on a non-profit basis a plan to provide benefits for basic health services to all residents of Alberta.

This provides health services beyond those covered by the provisions of the Canada Health Act.

Alberta Health is currently developing a common core health service that will meet provincial standards and be available in all regions. Core health services refer to those services which must be available or reasonably accessible to every person who needs them, when they need them. By defining core health services, Albertans will be aware of what services they can expect to have access to and who's responsible for their delivery. Madam Speaker, Albertans will know that when they are sick or hurt, they will get appropriate treatment in a timely manner.

The provision of medically necessary services for which a fee is charged to the patient is prohibited in the province of Alberta. As a result of the federal government's reinterpretation of the Canada Health Act regarding facility fees, private clinics in Alberta are not allowed to charge patients a facility fee for insured surgical services while at the same time billing the physician fee to the Alberta health care insurance plan. The government has since developed an approach which allows Albertans access to services provided in these clinics while ensuring that no private clinic providing insured medical and surgical services charges patients facility fees.

Private clinics in this province cannot charge patients facility fees for insured surgical services. This includes the use of advanced or new technology that is part of a medically necessary device or service, diagnostic tests required for a medically necessary surgery, diagnostic tests performed over and above those required for an insured surgery in order to identify or rule out disease that otherwise wouldn't be clinically apparent, surgical supplies and appliances necessary for a surgical procedure, or any of the essential facility costs needed to provide medically required services.

Madam Speaker, private clinics may, however, continue to charge patients for voluntary service enhancements, nonmedical costs, and uninsured services. This means that patients who want

to watch television in their room or videotape the birth of their child, if they want to have a tape made while the child's being delivered – I was going to say something else – they must pay for those extra services. I think that's reasonable, and I think members of the Assembly can agree that this is only fair and reasonable.

There are strict criteria that must be adhered to for those who charge a fee for goods and service enhancements. First, these fees must be discussed between the service provider and the patient. In other words, they have to be aware of what they're going to be charged for and how much the charge will be. They have to agree ahead of time to the service being provided, and the patient must understand that the charges are not part of the medically required service or on behalf of an essential facility or recovery of the equipment cost. In other words, the patient, even though they may be upset at the prospect of having surgery, has to understand that providing a TV is not a necessary requirement for recovery or part of the operation.

Probably the most important criterion is that patients who purchase enhanced services must not be allowed faster access to medically required services than those patients who choose not to purchase the enhancements. So it can't be used as a loss leader to get you into the hospital. All Albertans are entitled to reasonable access to appropriate health benefits based on their needs, not on their ability to pay.

In order to ensure quality, accessibility, and stability in the health system for today and the future, we must consider the needs of our changing population. We need to address not only our current pressure points in the system but establish a system that will be sustainable and responsive to the future needs of a growing and aging population. We must ensure that our health system is stable and sustainable well into the 21st century.

[The Speaker in the Chair]

During the reconstruction process Alberta Health considered not only the five principles of the Canada Health Act but also that the system must be contemporary, responsive to the needs of Albertans, efficient, cost-effective, and co-ordinated to ensure a continuum of services.

The Alberta Ministry of Health is working with other provinces, other territories, and the federal government to develop a vision for the future health system. This initiative will clarify the principles of the Canada Health Act to ensure that there are consistent standards of care across the country and reasonable access to quality services. On January 29 of this year, Mr. Speaker, the provincial and territorial health ministers released a report that was called *A Renewed Vision for Canada's Health System*. I would encourage all members of this Assembly, especially those here listening today, to read this document. It's a very insightful look at today's national health care system and its sustainability. It outlines the ministers' shared vision to maintain and protect the integrity of the national health system while at the same time improving the health and wellness of all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, the provinces and territories recognize the necessity to keep costs at an affordable level while continuing to meet the increasing demand and the health needs of a growing population. The provincial and territorial ministers hope to work again with the federal government to develop a renewed vision for Canada's health system. Clearly it would be redundant to enshrine the five principles of the Canada Health Act in provincial

legislation when they're already contained in the federal legislation. It's more appropriate at this time, I feel, to evaluate our present medicare system to determine how best to meet the health needs of Canadians today and well into the future.

I would like to reiterate that Alberta is committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act and that I strongly feel, Mr. Speaker, that the proposed motion is basically redundant. So while I firmly support the intent behind the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, I cannot support this motion. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for being able to say so.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I expect that all members of the Assembly would feel and wish that they could assist any other member who's going through a time of such personal distress in any way they could.

Mr. Speaker, moving on to deal with Motion 503, the motion in many respects is kind of a hope and a prayer. It's an invitation to the Legislature to do something to protect the elements that we all regard as so essential in our public health system, but it seems to me that what Albertans want is something far more than a hope and a prayer. I think what they want is a specific legislated response. Mr. Speaker, I draw members' attention to the fact that the Assembly has in fact seen before such a Bill, a Bill that particularizes and details with definitions and with specific clear provisions the hope and the prayer that we find in Motion 503. The Bill I'm referring to is the Alberta Health Care Entitlement and Accountability Act, a Bill which has been introduced in this Assembly by, I think, the Liberal opposition leader on both occasions.

4:20

The Alberta Health Care Accountability and Entitlement Act was a Bill that was brought forward because members in the Liberal caucus felt it was not good enough to simply rely on the federal government exerting its coercive power by suspension of money, imposition of fines. We didn't think that was good enough, and we didn't think it was good enough for the reason that members in this Assembly always seem to chafe and are quick to point out when the federal government appears to be stepping in and in some perceived way intruding on the way we manage the business of the province of Alberta.

The Bill that the Liberal opposition has introduced twice before and introduced again in this session as Bill 207 allows us in fact to make the policy decisions here, not to have to rely on the House of Commons or the federal Minister of Health to ensure that all Albertans have full access to necessary health services. We have attempted before and will attempt yet again this spring to give legislators in this province the opportunity to determine where the line should be drawn and how we take steps to ensure that Albertans who require a medically necessary service can do so and do so without regard to their income level and their asset base.

The Bill that was introduced in 1995 as Bill 201 and which is coming forward as Bill 207 in this session of the Legislature starts off with the proposition – it's a declaration, Mr. Speaker – that

there exists the right of all Albertans to receive adequate, continuous and personal medically necessary health care,

(a) regardless of where they reside in Alberta, and . . .

That's important given the differences, geography and other kinds of circumstance throughout parts of the province.

(b) . . . regardless of their ability to pay for such services.

Bill 207 goes on to list a number of important principles. It creates things like a health care advocate. It's not enough simply to attempt to set out or prescribe a set of rights for Albertans in terms of access to health care. There has to be some mechanism. There has to be some agency or office that's able to monitor what's going on in health care in this province. That was an important part of the previous Bill 201, introduced in 1994 by the leader of the Liberal opposition and which will be coming forward again sponsored by the leader of the Liberal opposition as Bill 207. So that is an important element that is included.

There's a host of provisions that allow the health care advocate, reporting to the Legislative Assembly, to be able to undertake investigations, to be able to do reports, to be able to do a number of things that I think would ensure that access to health care was monitored on an ongoing basis. There'd be an annual report to the Legislative Assembly, and because of the independence of the health care advocate, the work of that important officer would be invested with perhaps a kind of credibility that doesn't currently exist.

The issue is, I think, what we can do in this province, what we can do in the province of Alberta, to ensure high-quality medical services are available to everyone. The issue is an important one, because in this province what we see currently is a government that before the election was all too happy to flirt with supporting privatized health care and private health care facilities. We do remember the Hotel de Health situation, where the government was only too happy to support, encourage, enable that kind of a private health care initiative. Since that time, of course, we've seen the closure of the Holy Cross hospital, some 10 months ago, and we know that private health care operators have submitted bids, tenders, to be able to operate all or a portion of the Holy Cross hospital. The decision hopefully will be announced soon, but that's something that's important to Albertans, and people are watching carefully to see what the government is going to do. Mention has already been made of the Grace hospital, where in effect what we've done is we're allowing a for-profit operator to set up a very elaborate and extensive health care facility, one that will provide a range of services including some acute care services that are now available only through publicly funded hospitals and through the public health system. So this isn't an academic exercise. The issues are here, and they are important.

I think the reason why we need a Bill such as 207 is that there's a lot of mythology surrounding this. There are many people, certainly many in the government in the province of Alberta, who are convinced that we can no longer afford the kind of public health system that many Albertans have taken for granted and, if not taken for granted, certainly not treated as something that was particularly important in this country.

In fact, I was encouraged to see recently the National Forum on Health in their synthesis reports and issues papers make the observation at page 34. I'd just quote a brief excerpt from the report because it bears directly on the challenge facing us in Alberta now.

As alluded to earlier, our review of public and private financing issues indicates that public funding for medically required health services is undeniably superior to private financing, both from an efficiency and equity perspective. Private financing tends to promote system fragmentation, cost-shifting and access to services based on ability to pay. Public financing promotes system integrity, cost-control and access based on need.

That's a powerful message, Mr. Speaker, and it's one that frankly flies in the face of much of the practices that we see currently in the province of Alberta. All the more reason why we need a Bill

like 207, which ensures that first the debate happens in this Assembly, not out there by default on a case-by-case basis.

I think there is a huge range of issues to discuss relative to Bill 207. I think it's important to note that the motion that's been introduced as Motion 503 talks about enshrining the five principles of the Canada Health Act. That would be done in Bill 207. It talks about ensuring that "medically necessary services continue to be funded [exclusively] through public health care insurance." That also would be something that flows from Bill 207. The third element was a prohibition against "the provision of medically necessary services for which a fee is charged to the patient or to a nonpublic insurer." All of those goals in fact could be advanced through Bill 207, Mr. Speaker.

I think what is distressing to so many Albertans when we look at the proposal to utilize part of the Grace hospital is that we're seeing a change in our health care system that's happening not through a debate in this Assembly, not through some kind of public debate where Albertans can be heard and their concerns can be registered. We had an election on March 11, and quite irrespective of the outcome, even members of the government side will I expect acknowledge in a moment of candour that the number one issue they heard about was the apprehension that Albertans have about access to health care services. When they are sick, when a member of their family is sick, are they going to be able to access the appropriate service? Are they going to be able to do so in a timely way?

The concern we have, Mr. Speaker, is that the motion simply doesn't go far enough. What we need is legislation. We don't have to speculate about what the elements of that can be. We need only look to Bill 207. I encourage members to support this motion but more importantly to support Bill 207.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Royal Assent**

4:30

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[Mr. Day and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Associate Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

THE SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, H.A. "Bud" Olson, and Mr. Day entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

HIS HONOUR: Please be seated.

THE SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has, at its present sitting, passed certain Bills to which, and in the name of the Legislative Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

THE CLERK: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the Bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

6 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1997

7 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1997

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

THE CLERK: In Her Majesty's name His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these Bills.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and Mr. Day left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head:

Government Motions

Address to House by Mr. Rick Hansen

17. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Mr. Havelock:

Be it resolved that this House invite Mr. Rick Hansen to the floor of this Chamber to address the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, May 8, 1997, and that this address be the first order of business after Orders of the Day is called. The ordinary business of the Assembly will resume upon the conclusion of Mr. Hansen's address. Be it further resolved that Mr. Hansen's address become part of the permanent record of the Assembly.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Hansen is a symbol of courage and strength to all of us. He's been touring the country and promoting both in the past and for the future a greater recognition of neurotrauma and neurotrauma awareness. He would bring to the floor of this House, I think, an awareness of his crusade on behalf of all people who suffer in that area and the things we can do in that area. It would be enlightening to the House, and it would strengthen his appeal to the people of Alberta and the people of Canada.

[Motion carried]

head:

Government Bills and Orders

head:

Second Reading

Bill 2

Special Waste Management Corporation Act Repeal Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise this afternoon and move second reading of Bill 2, the Special Waste Management Corporation Act Repeal Act.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will simply complete the job of disposing of the Special Waste Management Corporation. While we will be

rolling up the corporation, as the Bill states, the money that is held by the corporation – and there is somewhere around \$1 million for remediation; I think it's \$1.1 million for a remediation fund – will be turned over to the environmental protection and enhancement fund, and also any proceeds from any property. It's true that we will still have the liability for an eventual cleanup of that site if and when that should happen.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a very straightforward Bill, and I would urge the support of the Assembly.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have an opportunity this afternoon to stand here and speak to Bill 2, the Special Waste Management Corporation Act Repeal Act.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, there is good news and bad news this afternoon. The good news is that the government thinks the fiasco that has dogged them over the years the Special Waste Management Corporation has been in operation is finally over. What this corporation did was leave Albertans with a legacy of mismanagement and political manipulation that consumed almost half a billion dollars in taxpayers' money.

MRS. SOETAERT: Shameful. How much?

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, \$493 million, less the million that's left over that's going to be transferred to the other fund. So in fact \$492 million plus the provision for cleanup, which the minister spoke to just now, which ranges in the order of anywhere from a low figure of \$30 million to a high figure of \$57 million. In fact, lots of dollars have been mismanaged and wasted through this corporation over the years.

4:40

In the initial stages what we were looking for from this corporation was a safe and efficient system in Alberta for dealing with hazardous waste. What we got was in fact a political nightmare that resulted in a financial boondoggle for Alberta second only to NovAtel. When we go to speak to this Bill, if you speak to it in terms of in principle supporting it, it is a complex issue. While it's a very small Bill, just two pages with any writing on them that repeals the Act, it's had a complex history, Mr. Speaker.

For the new members in this Assembly who haven't had the privilege of sitting here, seeing dollar after dollar, to half a billion dollars' worth, being wasted . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Frittered away.

MS CARLSON: . . . and frittered away, as my colleague says, I think they need to know that, Mr. Speaker, when we speak about repealing this Act. In fact, repealing this Act at this point in time may be premature.

MR. DICKSON: Tell us the awful history.

MS CARLSON: Yes. The awful history we need before we can make the decision on whether or not to repeal it or whether in fact we should take some time before doing that, because the bad news

might not be over. That's the bad-news part of this good-news, bad-news story, that we may still need this up until the end of December 31, 1998, when, lo and behold, Bovar has the option to give that fiasco back to the government. And they, Mr. Speaker, agreed to that. So this corporation may be needed.

For all of the new members here, let's take a look at some of the chronology of events that have led up to this discussion now in terms of repealing this Bill. It starts way back in March of 1984. That's when the government announced that the facility would be located near the town of Swan Hills in Alberta, when in fact they decided it was important for them to interfere in the marketplace and deal with hazardous waste on their own, even though at that time there were other options.

In April of '84 legislation came into force through . . .

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection is rising on a point of order. You have a citation?

Point of Order Relevance

MR. LUND: We are to be dealing with the principles of the Bill, and this is repealing. Now we're into the history of establishing. So relevance, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, in speaking to the principle of this Bill, clearly we all need a clear understanding of what the history has been here and what the potential is in the future for having to keep this Act or in fact repeal it. So I think in principle it is very important for all of us in the Assembly, not just the people who are returning members, to have a full context, a full historical context of what happened here.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair would observe that in dealing with the issue of relevance, often it's like beauty; it's in the eye of the beholder. Surely the history of the agency is relevant. However, if you go beyond that and refer to other things, as you've characterized them, then you would be off the topic of the Bill. But as long you're dealing with the Special Waste Management Corporation, I would presume that you're within the purview of relevance.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be sure to keep this chronology of events short and to the point in terms of just exactly what happened historically with this corporation and the resulting disaster.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Back to April of 1984. That was when legislation came into force in this Assembly that established this provincial corporation that we are now talking about repealing. Then in February of 1987 the corporation entered into a joint venture with Bow Valley Resource Services Ltd., which was later to become Bovar Inc., which is important for all of us to know here. This joint venture financed all of the construction of the Swan Hills facility, and it was operated by Chem-Security, which was a subsidiary of Bow Valley Resource Services.

In September of '87, following test burns and commissionings,

the Swan Hills facility held its official opening ceremony. That was, then, with the joint venture operation of this corporation that we are now speaking, in principle, of repealing.

In May of '89 the name was changed to Bovar. In December of '89 Trimac Limited acquired a 47 percent interest of the common shares of Bovar. In May of '92 the Natural Resources Conservation Board approved, with a cabinet authorization, an expansion of this facility. It was this particular expansion of the facility which led to a great deal of the financial boondoggle that resulted. That was under the mandate of the corporation which this minister is now saying needs to be repealed. What happened there was that the incineration capacity was expanded by approximately 40,000 tonnes per year. Now, the interesting thing about this, Mr. Speaker, is that while on the one hand this corporation, which was really an arm of government, was given the go-ahead to expand, on the other hand the government in here was limiting what they could dispose of at that waste treatment centre. So in fact one arm chopped off the other arm, which also resulted in a lot of money being lost here.

Then we get to April of 1993. The corporation and Bovar signed an amended joint venture agreement. In October of '93 the major expansion of the facility was completed, and test burns commenced shortly thereafter. In November of '94 the NRCB approved the importation of hazardous wastes from other Canadian jurisdictions. This is very important, because the corporation was losing a great deal of money by this time. Importation was approved by cabinet in February of '95. In January of '95, following the appointment of a new board and president, the corporation resolved to examine ways of divesting itself of its interests in the joint venture because by now we were accumulating a great amount of debt in here. Of course, it went on to become one of the greatest boondoggles that this province has ever experienced.

About that time the Auditor General became interested in what was going on here, Mr. Speaker, and we know that anytime the Auditor General takes a strong look at what's happening with some of the government operations, there's something to be said there and something clearly not going right. So he prepared a report that was many pages long, a very in-depth study of what was happening with Bovar and the Swan Hills treatment centre; in fact, 48 pages of information. I would daresay that certainly in my history with this Legislature it's the longest and most in-depth report the Auditor General has supplied on any particular issue.

One of the introductory comments that he has there, Mr. Speaker, is that "the government's involvement in the Swan Hills special waste treatment facility has not been successful." Well, clearly the understatement of the decade – there's no doubt about that – but very appropriate, actually, in terms of what we had been saying all along and what the people of the province soon came to know was true. In fact, in his recommendations he said that overall he didn't even consider this facility to be a business. The financial results shouldn't, he said, be declared as business losses, and in fact it was a government program, a subsidy to industry in full competition with other industries, and could clearly be called corporate welfare by any other standards, even though this was delivered in co-operation with a private-sector partner. He also stated that in his view, the benefits that did accrue out of this in terms of getting rid of some hazardous waste "could have been achieved for less cost" in other kinds of manners, certainly not by having the government involved in it and certainly not by having this particular corporation that we are talking about repealing now

involved in it. So some interesting comments that the Auditor General had to say.

He gave some recommendations and some guidance to the reader at the end of his report, and he said that in general this corporation as an arm of government made two strategic mistakes. One was that the terms of the joint venture agreements between the corporation and Bovar were poorly done. The other was the decision to go forward with

a major expansion of the Swan Hills facility in 1992 without first ensuring that the regulatory requirements necessary to obtain the facility's forecasted waste streams were in place, and that the capital costs to be incurred would be consistent with the future economic operation of the facility.

In fact, then, the government should have never limited what was allowed to go there and should not have gone on with the expansion.

So how does this speak to the principle of this Bill? I think it's very important for us to establish, number one, did this corporation do a good job in terms of its management with this facility, or did it do a poor job? Number two, given that the government is very likely to get this back at the end of this time period – in fact, on December 31, 1998 – should this corporation stay in place? If not, then the question arises: what else should be there to take care of it? Clearly the government has shown they can't manage it. Clearly this corporation has shown they can't manage it either. So who, then, Mr. Speaker, is going to be responsible for taking over the operations of this management, and who is going to effectively oversee . . .

MR. SAPERS: The old CKUA board.

MS CARLSON: The old CKUA board. There you go. I understand there's a few people there who need a job.

Then who is going to oversee the cleanup, which we have already stated is somewhere between \$30 million and \$57 million? We want to make sure the \$57 million does not become \$150 million or some other kind of escalation of costs, which we have seen happen here time after time after time, every single time, in fact, that this government has interfered in business.

So having given that short chronology of events, I have a great deal more that I want to say when this gets to committee, Mr. Speaker. In light of the time I will sit down and let some of my other colleagues pick up on this issue.

4:50

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I particularly appreciated the brief recitation of the storied history of special waste management in Alberta, because it has been an interesting part of the political and environmental landscape of the province for the last number of years.

Just a couple of thoughts in looking at Bill 2, following up on the comments made by my colleague who spoke just a moment ago. It is curious. Since there's the potential for the plant to revert pursuant to – what do we call it? – the divestment agreement, would it not make more sense to wait until that agreement has matured? Because there is, if we can describe it, a contingent liability, and wouldn't it make sense to wait until we know whether that liability has vested or lapsed before we take a step with the finality that Bill 2 brings us or reflects?

I'd be interested in some explanation from the Minister of

Environmental Protection. The tax dollars have been lost, hon. minister, through the Speaker. We know what the impact has been to the Alberta Treasury and Alberta taxpayers. At this stage, why not simply leave the shell there until there's no longer any possibility of anything reverting under the agreement that was entered into with Bovar? That would seem to me to be a reasonably prudent thing to do.

The other couple of questions I had relate to section 2 of Bill 2. In fact, I was trying to think of some positive benefits to the people of Alberta through our sorry experience with special waste management. I guess one of the things is that we might say it was the windup of the Special Waste Management Corporation plant that perhaps catapulted the current Minister of Justice into high office, so there were certainly some benefits that accrued from wrapping up this process. But my comment, Mr. Speaker, would be this. I don't think Albertans have seen a current accounting in terms of what 2(a) would describe as the "money held by the Corporation and all proceeds from the disposition of any rights, property or assets." We've got things being transferred to the environmental protection and enhancement fund. One would think it would just be appropriate, in terms of winding up, that we would have a current financial statement cataloguing those various assets and receivables so we know precisely what we're dealing with there. The last kind of accounting I think was done when the Auditor General looked at the Swan Hills plant and did his report. That is some two years old, so why don't we have a current accounting to particularize what's caught in section 2(a) of Bill 2?

Now, the other thing I thought was interesting is 2(b), "the Crown in right of Alberta is liable for the obligations and liabilities of the Corporation." Well, not only would it be useful to have an inventory of the assets that are being taken over, but it would be useful to have an inventory of any outstanding obligations and liabilities of the corporation, anything that's accrued since the two-year-old report of the Auditor General and his examination. Mr. Speaker, I think that would be helpful.

Section 2(c) in Bill 2 provides for the Minister of Environmental Protection to step in and basically stand in the place of the Special Waste Management Corporation until all outstanding agreements under section 15 have expired. In looking at section 15 of the Special Waste Management Corporation Act, it's very expansive. Section 15(1) talks about the corporation entering into agreements to operate hazardous waste management facilities. The agreement can be entered into with virtually anyone. It says "other persons," and persons would mean individuals or corporations. Have we got a list? If in fact there are no individuals or corporations, no persons within the meaning of section 15 that are party to some kind of an agreement, it would be useful to know that. Bill 2 doesn't make that clear at all, and the explanation from the minister didn't, I think, address that either.

Section 15 also goes on to provide for other agreements in terms of storing hazardous waste. Other people may be operating a facility, a form of subcontractor. It would be useful to know if there's anybody out there doing that. I'm interested just from a legal perspective, Mr. Minister.

Sections 15.2(6) and 15.3 talk about certain penalties to accrue to someone who has failed to comply with an enforcement order. There's a process one goes through before an enforcement order is issued, and I'm wondering whether in fact there are people who – and maybe there would be nobody on the horizon who would be subject to this. You wouldn't want Bill 2 to have the result of prejudicing a prosecution against somebody who had in fact contravened one of the elements of one of the agreements that had

been there entered into earlier. So I think that would be important to establish as well.

Those are the questions I've got. I, like I think all other Albertans, would be happy to be rid of special waste management, but I think the responsible thing to do is to go into this knowing exactly what contingent liabilities the taxpayers or the people of Alberta may have and what sorts of contractual arrangements are going to survive the Special Waste Management Corporation Act. I'd be interested in getting that kind of information from the hon. minister.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a couple of comments that probably could be interpreted more in terms of questions on the Bill than as discussion. When we look at the Bill, it really is basically very simple in the sense of what it's intended to do. But if we look at section 2 in it, what then comes into play here is that essentially all of the assets are being transferred over to the environmental protection and enhancement fund. Here what we're dealing with, then, is that basically whatever's left inside the corporation goes over there, yet at the point in time when any liability arises from the actions that could be related to any actions of the Special Waste Management Corporation, those financial obligations fall back on to the general revenue and that.

I think what we should be looking at, if we carry through with this process, is the possibility here of trying to get some relationship such that at some point in time if there is a liability, the assets that are transferred to the environmental protection and enhancement fund up to that limit have to come back to general revenue to cover that liability. You know, in essence what we're doing is that we've got an income transfer or an asset transfer here from general revenues out to a fund which then has a life that goes beyond the annual budget aspects of the general revenue, so at some future year down the line we could be subject to a significant liability where we've got the assets of this dissolved corporation sitting out in this fund which we can't have access to. So we should possibly put in a reversion clause that those assets, if they're needed to cover those liabilities, have to come back to general revenue to be used so that we can kind of keep it straight.

5:00

I guess the other issue that comes up is if at some point in time the assets of the plant, the site, do revert to the Crown, like is built into the possibilities of the agreement with Bovar, what happens then in the context of this Bill? We've already heard from the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*; he expressed some concerns about it. In terms of those assets, if there's any value to them, do they follow the route of the assets as specified by this Act, or how do we deal with that? Do we separate the assets at that time, again, from the liabilities that accrue? What we could end up with, then, is some market value of the equipment that sits in that plant. This creates dollars that are available then. Do those become part of the assets that go to the environmental protection and enhancement fund? Then possibly the environmental cleanup is an ongoing process for two or three years. Does that come out of general revenue? Then we've got, again, another income transfer or an asset transfer into that fund with an obligation to the general revenue.

So I guess, in terms of dealing with this, it might be more

appropriate to leave the shell corporation there for the time span that we are liable to the contract with Bovar and the possible increased obligation that we could have if they, in essence, give the facility back to the province. So then we could have, you know, a nice easy way to look at the mix and keep the value of the assets and have assets that we can use, then, to pay off any developing liabilities.

From that perspective, I guess, those are the issues that I have. If we can be sure that at no point in time there will be future liabilities, this is a very good idea just to get legislation off the books. Let's clear it up and get rid of it so that it's gone. But if we've still got these questions that have to be answered, I guess I would ask the minister to kind of tell us how he sees those kinds of things operating within the context of the structure of this Act before he asks for the members of this Legislature to support it, because it could cause some real concerns in terms of how those dollars are handled subject to the provisions of section 2 in the Bill.

So basically, as I said at the start, those are questions that I'd like to have the minister address before he asks for our support on this. Other than that, if he can give the right answers to it, it's a great Bill, and we should support it and get it off the books.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, management of hazardous waste by the private sector can best be regulated directly by environmental protection. Regarding Bill 2, environmental protection: the words mean a lot. Environmental protection means more than pouring millions in subsidies into a financially bottomless pit. Sweetheart deals which give a generous guaranteed rate of return have proved not in the best interests of this province's finances or its environment. We cannot allow the protection of the environment to take a back seat to the protection of business. Sound environmental policy is not a detriment to business; they should go hand in hand.

The idea that the environment is a public holding and something in which we all have an interest is a sound one. We are – and I shall use a word that this government uses; the word is stakeholder – stakeholders. Yes, that is right. The men, women, and children of this province are all stakeholders in the environment. There is no sense in having public participation in environmental protection if it is to be symbolic. Consultation is not offered to all parties and other members of the public concerning the deregulation of environmental policy. A Progressive Conservative caucus . . .

MR. LUND: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment Protection is rising on a point of order. You have a citation for us?

Point of Order Relevance

MR. LUND: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Under *Beauchesne* 459, edition 6. The hon. member is going on about something that is totally irrelevant to the repeal of this Act. He fails to point out that the plant at Swan Hills, operated by this corporation, in fact did clean up the PCBs in the province of Alberta. So when he goes on about how it didn't do anything for the environment, he is absolutely wrong.

For that matter, if you want to take the cost of just household

garbage in the province of Alberta over the 10-year period, it even exceeds what the Special Waste Management Corporation cost the province of Alberta.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the point of relevance, and then we'll make a ruling.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, regarding the Swan Hills waste treatment plant and the fact that the oil field waste was exempt from the Swan Hills treatment facility, I think my points are relevant.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, to the extent that the hon. member was deviating from speaking to the Special Waste Management Corporation, then indeed it would be not relevant. But if in speaking to the issue the minister was talking more to the debate and was clarifying what the costs were and that kind of thing to clean up and the effectiveness of what the waste management had cleaned up, that to me is part of the debate as opposed to whether it's relevant or not.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, would you continue to deal with the Special Waste Management Corporation Act Repeal Act.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A Progressive Conservative caucus task force rather than an independent panel or an all-party legislative committee is manipulating the environmental policy. The Member for Calgary-Egmont spoke yesterday afternoon: "up against the wall financially."

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

Point of Order Relevance

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection is rising on the point of relevance.

Are you talking about a committee that is dealing with waste management, or are you talking about environmental protection? This is not an Act to repeal environmental protection; it's an Act to repeal the Special Waste Management Corporation under the Department of Environmental Protection. To that extent I will ask you to take care to stay within the waste management corporation and not deal with the whole issue of environmental protection.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: The Member for Calgary-Egmont was right. One of the reasons why we have this trouble – we're up against the wall – is because of this special waste treatment facility. The only special waste treatment that has gone on there, Mr. Minister, has been the burning of taxpayers' dollars. That's the special waste.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I really must rise and speak to this Bill today.

MR. SAPERS: Raise those expectations, David.

MR. HANCOCK: Somebody's got to do it for Edmonton. The Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation has

celebrated last year 10 years of service to the province of Alberta in destroying special and hazardous wastes.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's costing money.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, it costs money. It always costs money when you do a job that's necessary for the people in the public.

Our industry in this province was able to look towards a special waste management facility which could destroy hazardous wastes and preserve our environment and leave this province of ours a better place. The time for government involvement in that waste management plant has come and gone. The time for the demise of the corporation is now, but we can't stand by and let the members opposite denigrate the history of this corporation and the things that it has done for this province. The Special Waste Management Corporation has done a good job. Alberta is now PCB free. We've destroyed other hazardous wastes, and now it's time to move on and the corporation now demise.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is rising on a point of order. You have a citation?

5:10

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, under Standing Orders I'm wondering if the member will entertain a question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, would you entertain a question? You just have to say yes or no. You don't have to give reasons for either answer.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes.

Debate Continued

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much. You alluded to the fact that you felt that the government had to do a job. I'm wondering if the member thinks that the government . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, if you direct your questions and speech to the Speaker as opposed to directly over there, it gets us into a lot less difficulties in the long run.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, my apologies.

When the member alluded to the government doing a job, I'm wondering if the minister thinks that it's necessary for the government to do the job properly or if to just do the job is good enough.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think that's a very good question, because if she'd been listening to what I was saying, I was expounding on the fact that Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation did the job and did the job well for 10 years.

MR. SAPERS: Hundreds of small mammals would disagree with you, hon. minister, but that will come up later in debate.

I am happy to join debate at second reading of Bill 2. Of course, this is the point in debate on a Bill when we're supposed

to discuss principle. That's difficult because it's hard to know what the principle of this Bill is, except maybe the principle of hit and run. We're dealing here with a Bill that is going to try to rewrite history. We're going to repeal the Special Waste Management Corporation Act. We're told by the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs that we are celebrating 10 years of service of the Special Waste Management Corporation – celebrating, Mr. Speaker, a celebration. This is certainly a heck of a party. It's about a \$600 million party that we're celebrating, and that's a heck of a celebration. I wonder what it would have cost if this government ever wanted to celebrate doing something right, how much money they would pour into it.

Bill 2 is an attempt to put the final nail in the coffin of what has not been the most successful foray of this government into business. Of course, it hasn't been the most unsuccessful foray either, Mr. Speaker. There's been worse squandering of public funds, but this one ranks right up there with them. We've got about \$490 million to \$500 million in direct losses. We had to pay the company to take the pig back off our hands afterwards. Anyway, we gave them money. [interjection] Thank you, hon. member.

The most amazing thing about this is that Alberta truly is a place that's open for business, you know. We support the Special Waste Management Corporation with taxpayers' dollars, and then the government changes regulations. The playing field changes considerably. The business doesn't materialize. They run into trouble. We negotiate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

DR. WEST: Under *Beauchesne* 482 would the member entertain a question in debate, please?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: He never does. He never will. He never has yet.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to, because you know we're voting on the same lines.

Debate Continued

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I believe – and the Blues will verify this – that the hon. member stated that the loss in relationship to this operation was \$600 million. Would the hon. member verify that to this Assembly?

MR. SAPERS: To the best of my ability, Mr. Speaker, the numbers that I'm familiar with are about \$593 million in losses, about a million dollars in assets, leaving about \$492 million, but there's maybe up to a \$57 million contingent liability, which I was just getting to, actually, in my comments, to do with the cleanup afterwards. You run that all together, and you get about \$550 million, but you know this government has made so many mistakes – \$29 million missing here with Millar Western, a million dollars missing here with another one – that I just sort of rounded it up to around \$600 million.

Now, if I'm proven wrong, Mr. Speaker, when we get public

accounts, you know, in years to come, I will be happy to correspond with the Minister of Energy and explain that, but I'm going to go with my projection of about \$600 million. You know, I hope that I'm wrong. I'm hoping that it's only \$557 million, because at least we'd save a few tax dollars there. If the minister wants to quibble about just how big a mess the government has made of this, I'd be happy to quibble with him about just how big a mess, but I think we can agree that it's a huge mess.

I hope the minister is satisfied with the answer he got.

DR. WEST: Well, is this how you round off your spending?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. The Bill.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. I was just going to talk about the contingent liability.

Of course what the Bill does, as I said, is bang the final nail in that coffin they want to bury the Special Waste Management Corporation in. When the government negotiated the sale back to the operators, we gave them more tax dollars to take that off our hands, but they negotiated in there a clause that says that the people of Alberta will still be responsible for environmental cleanup as a result of the operations of the plant.

What I find really ironic about that, Mr. Speaker, is that apparently the minister of environment at the time, who continues to sit in this House, now only with a different job, apparently was informed about some leaching of dangerous chemicals into groundwater. So you would think that Executive Council would have been aware of environmental damage, and you'd think that they would have gone: "Wait a minute. We're not going to negotiate in that sale, in that transfer, in that giveaway" – call it what you will – "taxpayers' liability for something that we know is there. We're not going to pretend that we don't know it's there." But, you know, that's exactly what they did. So we lost money on the initial investment, we lost money on paying back the operators, and now we're going to lose money again on the environmental cleanup.

You know, this really is, as I say, a province full of business opportunities if you can just get close enough to the government. You can be paid for taking advantage of taxpayers if you know the right way to do it. It even beats those buy now, pay never stock options that we've heard about in the past, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 2 is premature, to say the least. We don't know what's going to happen. We don't know whether this corporation is going to come back. We don't know whether or not there's still going to be a need for . . .

DR. WEST: There's no doubt his experience with the John Howard Society gave him the expertise to talk about this.

THE SPEAKER: Order.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

We don't know whether this company is going to come back. We really truly don't know. I do appreciate the Minister of Energy's question, because he's absolutely right. We don't know the true extent of the loss. The final accounting hasn't happened yet, and it could be considerably more. Let's hope that it isn't.

Even the Auditor General in his '94-95 report about Swan Hills, in section 2, page 11, Mr. Minister, if you want to read it – you can ask the Auditor General a question perhaps – states very clearly, bottom line, "In my view, however, these benefits could

have been achieved for less cost." So no matter what it was that was good that the corporation achieved – and there were some benefits – they said that it "could have been achieved for less cost."

Now, I don't know what's changed. I don't know if the Auditor General could go further and tell us exactly how much less so we'd get a full picture of just how badly taken advantage of the public purse was. I daresay that some members of the front bench know the true extent of that. Or maybe it's some former members of the front bench, and maybe that's why they're not there anymore, Mr. Speaker. It's just speculation. But clearly Bill 2 does not permit the people of Alberta access to the whole story, and the faster this government moves to repeal the Act and deep-six the corporation, the farther away we're ever going to get from that full story.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environmental Protection did speak to the Bill, talked about why it was really important to pass this Bill and why we should repeal the Act now and get rid of the corporation now, but he didn't really enlighten the House as to why. He didn't talk about timing. He didn't talk about the necessity. You know, there is a lot of controversy now. In fact, there may even be some lawsuits, I hear, pending about the operation of Swan Hills: what's happened in terms of groundwater being contaminated and the food chain being contaminated? I'm just wondering whether or not the apparent haste and perhaps the undue haste that the government is moving with to repeal the Act and to wrap up the corporation may have something to do with those lawsuits.

I'm not a lawyer, but I know that the government does consult with lawyers from time to time. Even the Minister of Justice has practised law. He would know whether or not there's a relationship between the potential exposure – well, he did practise; didn't he? Yes, for a resource company. So he has some expertise. I'm just wondering if there's any relationship at all between the legal exposure that the government has and the rush with which Bill 2 is coming through.

I mean, it's Bill 2, Mr. Speaker. It came so early on the Order Paper. I'm told by the government that we could be looking at as many as perhaps 30 pieces of legislation coming to the Assembly in this sitting. Of course, we've only seen 9 of them, so we don't really know what the others may be. This one comes as Bill 2, as a real priority. This got onto the agenda as a priority right off the bat. Maybe it's a tribute to how powerful and influential the Minister of Environmental Protection is at the cabinet table. Maybe it is, or maybe it's for some other far darker reason, maybe something even sinister.

MR. DICKSON: It's a companion to Bill 1.

MR. SAPERS: I'm advised that it's a companion to Bill 1. We all know that the effect of Bill 1 is to take out of the public domain those things that should be properly kept in the public domain. I'm advised that this is a brief and empty Bill. I wouldn't say that necessarily, but it is one thin page on perhaps a \$600 million debacle.

So, Mr. Speaker, I can't support Bill 2 at this point, and I would hope that during the course of debate we get some more explanation from the government as to why this Bill must come into force now, why we must repeal the Act now, why we should wind up the corporation. I would hope that as the government comes forward in its spirit of openness and transparency – and

sometimes you can see right through them – they will tell us perhaps the true extent of what this is going to cost.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments by making this one final observation on Bill 2 at this point. Bill 2, being the thin and empty Bill that it may be, is a Bill that comprises approximately 140 words. About 140 words. If it's 140 words and if we're at about \$560 million, Mr. Minister – can we saw it off at about \$560 million? Do you know what that means? That means that we're talking about \$4 million a word. Four million dollars a word is what this Bill really speaks to, about \$4 million a word. I think that if it's that pricey a piece of legislation, it does deserve a little more explanation, a little more clarity, a little more elucidation from the government's front bench. Maybe, once we have that information, we could understand the \$4 million a word price tag on this Bill, but without that information I can't support it.

Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has moved adjournment of debate on Bill 2. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening, when we reconvene in Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that the Assembly do now adjourn and that when we reconvene at 8 this evening, we do so in Committee of Supply. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

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

