

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 12, 1997 **8:00 p.m.**
Date: 97/05/12
head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order. First of all, I would remind hon. members again that we're going to have only one member standing and talking at a time. For those who are in the gallery, this is the informal part of the Legislature. Hon. members are able to ask questions, and the minister responds to the questions. People may speak more than twice to an issue. We have a specialized forum tonight.

Before we commence with the estimates for 1997-98 for Executive Council, I wonder if we might have unanimous consent to briefly revert to the introduction of special guests.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a couple of special guests that are presently in the members' gallery: first of all, Ms Bauni Mackay, the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, and with her Dr. Roy Wilson, who's the president of the Alberta School Boards Association. I'd ask that they rise.

head: Main Estimates 1997-98

Executive Council

THE CHAIRMAN: Just to refresh everyone's memory, tonight we have a special agreement as to how we're going to conduct it. We're going to have 20 minutes from the minister, representing the Premier. We'll have 20 minutes from the Official Opposition and five minutes from the third party.

So we'll start this evening's deliberations, then, with the hon. Provincial Treasurer and Acting Premier.

MR. DAY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Tonight I will attempt to answer some of the questions on these estimates which were put to the Premier when he was here only a few days ago. I will say right from the start that I will not be able to respond as efficiently or with such knowledge or feeling as the Premier would if he were here, but I will try to fill in in a small way on some of the areas which he wanted specifically mentioned tonight and of course invite members to continue to pose questions. Those other questions which won't be covered in my time-limited remarks tonight certainly will be covered in terms of correspondence from the Premier to those people who put the questions. In his absence let me just comment on some areas which he felt were a priority to members opposite and see if we can satisfy some of the concerns. If not, by all means keep those cards and letters coming, and we'll be happy to respond.

When the Premier appeared here on April 29, there was discussion related to questions about the chief information officer

and the Public Affairs Bureau, and on the Premier's behalf I'd like to address some of those. First of all, for the record, just clarifying the role of the chief information officer, the CIO, there seems to be some confusion on this point. Certainly the confusion wouldn't be from any lack of communication that's been put out by the government, but sometimes I understand that opposition members do get buried and smothered with a lot of documentation, and maybe I could just assist them with some clarification. This position actually has nothing to do with the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation. It's actually the focal point for addressing some of the emerging technological challenges that we face as we move along the information highway.

You'll recall, Mr. Chairman, that in September of '96 we transferred all responsibilities for this area from the Department of Economic Development and Tourism to the office of the chief information officer. There really wasn't a place to house that office other than the Premier's office, and the position was filled by one of his assistants, George Samoil. Again, to clarify his significant credentials and just touching on the highlights of his illustrious career and skipping some of the smaller details, he's a graduate of Simon Fraser University, majoring in the areas of mass communications and information technology. He has 10 years' experience in policy and legislation, working with all government departments.

There are several duties which are significant and onerous, yet we believe he is the man for the task. He is the government's primary contact for the federal government, for other jurisdictions – universities, schools, hospitals, municipalities, and industries – that have business with the government on policy issues related to telecommunications and information technology. That alone would be enough for five or six people to handle, but on his own he will handle that along with chairing Alberta's information highway advisory committee, which addresses national standards and issues around access to and the security of electronic information in the marketplace.

He's also a member of the provincial/territorial senior officials' working group, which helps the federal government on this initiative. And as if that wasn't enough, he chairs the Chief Information Officers' Council, with officers appointed from executive level in every government department. This council helps to co-ordinate the government's efforts relative to information resources under the business plan. It is, I mention with some pride, the first council of its kind in Canada.

As the Premier also mentioned, the CIO is responsible for co-ordinating the government's preparations for converting our computer system for the year 2000, a daunting task facing not just this government but the computer systems around the world, as a matter of fact.

Finally, the Chief Information Officer Internet Committee plans the development of guidelines and standards for the Alberta government's presence on the Internet. That's an area that's expanding daily, I can tell you. I'll shortly talk about that a little more in my responses to questions about the Public Affairs Bureau.

Having mentioned the Public Affairs Bureau – thank you for raising it – I would like to say that the member who asked about that was inquiring as to whether service to Albertans would suffer as a result of the changes at the Public Affairs Bureau. In fact, Mr. Chairman, thanks to the use of new technology, Albertans are getting more timely and comprehensive information than ever before. Let me give you some examples of the work done on the

Internet. We now have the complete RITE telephone directory on-line along with news releases, major announcements, and links to every government department. I've personally heard from constituents about how they enjoy this particular service. I'm sure all members here have heard similar comments. The new software is helping people find what they're looking for. It gives them virtually instant access to every Alberta government document that's out there in cyberspace. It's a tremendous service: true accountability, and openness.

Customers of the Queen's Printer bookstores can look at a catalogue of books and make purchases all on-line. So if we're talking about access for and empowerment of people, here it is right here. That RITE system handles about 3 million calls a year, members might be interested to know, and it's another good example of how technology actually helps Albertans get better access to government and, which is especially exciting for us, at a lower cost overall.

Today people can use a single toll-free number to reach government offices across the province. If I'm not wrong, that number is 310-0000. So you've got it on the record, and when you send that *Hansard* out to your constituents, the hundreds who want to read it, they need to be reminded that that number gives you instant access to any office. If you want to talk to the Premier's office from anywhere in the province: 310-0000 and say, "I'd like the Premier's office." You'll have the Premier's office instantly. You might even get the Premier himself. He may be on another line, but you'll get put right through to his office. They can dial the number they want themselves, or they can get help from the RITE operators between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Did you hear those hours? Eight a.m. to 6 p.m. I don't know if there's another government in the country that makes itself accessible those kinds of nonbanker hours: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Or you can leave a message outside of those hours. So even if you phone late, you can leave a message.

Also, real-number dialing lets government employees reach each other directly across the province toll free without using those lengthy access codes. I know members opposite have already used that extensively in their own attempts at research, and this is a measure that will save government half a million dollars a year in long-distance toll. Half a million a year.

There were questions on public opinion research. The Premier wanted you to know that the bureau's last provincewide tracking studies were actually conducted about four years ago, and they were released of course back in August of '93. So they were tracked, information was gathered, and the information was released. The bureau surveys people also who use its services as part of its business operations, and those surveys are described in its annual performance measures report, which I know members opposite have read. So I won't get into the details of those. The surveys, how they're recorded, and the annual audit and performance measurements are all public in those documents. The latest one, actually, was released just recently and should answer your questions about the methodology and the results of those surveys. So it's all very public and available. If you like, I'll provide you with a copy together with the written responses to the other questions on those particular ones.

Most of the bureau's research funds are spent on subscriptions to publications like *Focus on Canada*, the Angus Reid Alberta report. These publications actually are available to anyone who cares to subscribe, a little revenue generation there, being careful with taxpayer dollars. The bureau's contract with the company

supplying these reports actually prohibits us from copying and distributing the material. That's not our ruling; that's a legal ruling related to their own contract.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

Certainly the Premier has no problem with members seeing that data. We do just have to get approval from the companies when those requests come in. Once we've acquired the necessary approval, the Premier will invite the opposition to contact his communications office and make arrangements to come and look at the information. So it's there for you, should you want to see it. Accommodation will be made, and we'll put the coffee on.

8:10

Hon. members also seem to be under the impression that the bureau does research for all of government, but actually other government departments do their own research and choose their own suppliers and reports, as I know the opposition at times do their own research.

In terms of publications and revenue, a number of questions were asked about the publications and about revenue. The revenue actually comes from the sale of the printed material regarding legislation and other government publications, and that comes through the Queen's Printer bookstores, which are operated by the publication services. As you probably know, these bookstores sell products and services on a cost-recovery basis. I think that's good and responsible care, again, of taxpayer dollars. The estimates show a surplus of \$300,000 in this area, but the bureau's budget doesn't cover overhead costs like buildings, taxes, utilities, et cetera. Those are covered by Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services. In the past year 11 staff members at the bookstores have handled, if you can believe this – this shows the interest of Albertans in their government – 30,000 orders, and that's generated revenue of about \$1.6 million. I think that shows a healthy area of interest from Albertans in terms of what is going on in their province.

Revenues from these operations have increased over the last three years, Madam Chairman, because of the introduction of new products like the electronic versions of Alberta legislation. Exciting stuff. We actually expect this revenue to level out over the next three years as most customers' purchases begin to shift towards updating these products rather than purchasing them outright. There will be ongoing updates that will complete their own files.

Some of the products that are currently in development are topic-specific legislative packages that are available in electronic form. Examples of that would be in Education and Energy and an electronic version of the Alberta Rules of Court. Invite your friends and neighbours over on a Friday night for that one. By the way, we are the first government in Canada to produce in that form. When other governments see the demand for that particular item, they will be following suit quickly. Further details of the bureau's operations are published in its annual report, which is available, again, to anyone who wants them, again signaling our own ongoing desire and the Premier's commitment to openness and to accountability.

Now, there were a number of very detailed questions which were posed by hon. members that the Premier has given very clear instruction he wants time taken to allow the proper research on. Actually there's an expense to that, but he has indicated clearly that he wants those questions responded to in a detailed form, even as they were asked, so that you do have the informa-

tion that you are wanting. Those written responses will be provided.

The Premier, once again, extends his regrets that he is not here for very obvious health reasons. He wants you to know and I can tell you that he is doing well in spite of the fact that he is considerable pain. He is up to the minute by minute on what is going on daily in the Assembly and around Alberta, and he again gives his commitment to respond to each of those questions.

I would now ask the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca to address certain questions that you had about northern development from his capacity of being an excellent chair in that particular area.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. What I want to do briefly, if time allows, is make some follow-up comments on the Northern Alberta Development Council. In relation to the April 29, 1997, subcommittee of supply there were a number of questions raised, and I would just like to enter those in *Hansard*. Whatever time doesn't allow, I can pass along in writing.

The Member for Edmonton-Norwood asked the question about the return-service rate for the Northern Alberta Development Council bursary. The average return-service rate over the past 20 years has been at 69 percent among students who received the Northern Alberta Development Council bursary. This is, I believe, a good rate considering that we are dealing with young people who are often still deciding what to do with their lives. The job market is consistently changing in northern Alberta, and those who do not complete their return service pay back the bursary. So the program is working quite well. However, we are, of course, trying to increase the return service and set a target at 75 percent at this time.

What we do is survey northern employers to find out which occupations are high in demand, and then we target students who are closer to graduating. Often they are in their final year. Also we ask the students to demonstrate in their bursary application that they are committed to working in northern Alberta. At the same time, we consider students' financial needs of course. The most recent return-service rate is at 72 percent based on 1995 graduates who are working after one year of graduation.

There is a second small bursary program which is a bursary partnership program with private industry. The bursary partnership program is cost shared between the Northern Alberta Development Council and northern community organizations and businesses. There are three options of cost sharing that particular project. Some of the sponsors include oil and gas companies, forestry companies, boards of trade, agricultural societies, health regions, school divisions, and colleges. Funds for this comes out of the return-service bursary budget, which is a reasonably small budget at this time. It's \$110,000 to \$130,000. That is what is anticipated to be spent this year. Forty-five percent of those recipients of that particular bursary are aboriginal students, and 90 percent are in their first or second year of study. That program is working well, and we are hoping to review it in the near future and see how we may improve it.

Edmonton-Norwood again asked how educational attainment is being improved by facilitating the development of stay-in-school strategies in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. The Northern Alberta Development Council worked with a steering committee made up of representatives from some of the major oil

companies – Suncor, Syncrude – and the Athabasca Tribal Council, the Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association, and the municipality of Wood Buffalo in order to facilitate the development of stay-in-school strategies for that particular area. This year that area also researched aboriginal stay-in-school programs across Canada and visited all of the Northland schools in the municipality to identify needs and program ideas. This information was distributed to all steering committee members and the Northland school division also, which covers a good portion of the northern development area. We have made a standing offer to follow up with these groups and to implement stay-in-school strategies. Regrettably, to date no further action has been taken on this, but we will continue to follow up on it.

Again, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood asked: what other benefits have there been to aboriginal communities as a result of the council? As you realize, the council has been around since 1963, and I think a major change took place back in 1992 and again in 1995. Aboriginal concerns are important to the Northern Alberta Development Council. Charles Wood from Saddle Lake and Floyd Thompson from the Kikino Métis settlement also helped keep the council informed of aboriginal issues, because there is a high population of aboriginal people in communities within that council area.

Our priorities of course are focused on education and training and encouraging the increased local benefits from resource development. That seems to be the key area in that region right now: the lack of supports that are required to move people from the regular education system to a postsecondary education and apprenticeship programs and so on.

8:20

The Northern Alberta Development Council has hosted in the past year two major conferences combined with trade shows to promote linkage between industry and aboriginal businesses. Nearly 180 delegates attended a conference and trade show in Fort McMurray about a year ago, and 200 delegates registered in a similar event in Cold Lake last February. These events bring industry, community, and aboriginal business together in a positive way to discuss how employment and business opportunities may be increased for the aboriginal community.

A question was asked by Calgary-Cross – I think most of them were answered; there were a couple that we didn't complete the answers to because of time – in relation to a review of the timber permit program. I'll just give a quick update on that. The Northern Alberta Development Council's review on that particular program is based only on commercial timber permits and also the old miscellaneous timber unit program; MTU they're called. Of course, we are not reviewing incidental wood supply from allocations from major FMA holders such as Alberta-Pacific, Daishowa, and others. A steering committee made up of representatives of the industry will be discussing these results, and the Northern Alberta Development Council will then prepare recommendations that will be forwarded to the Minister of Environmental Protection in the near future.

One of the other concerns that was brought forward, a good question again from Edmonton-Norwood, was in relation to rail transportation in the Peace region. It's a very important issue. I hope I have time to be able to discuss that a bit. Our strategy has been gathering and sharing information . . . That's it?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Sorry, hon. member, but your time is up.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I would also like to thank the hon. Treasurer for so aptly sitting in for the Premier. One can tell by the rapidness with which he read off the reply to some of the questions we had asked in the last go-round with Executive Council that one of the pastimes of the Treasurer is auctioneering. Some of the answers were given to some of the questions that were asked with regards to the budget. However, there are still some answers that are outstanding and that seem to skirt around the issues, and they centre around the Public Affairs Bureau and the CIO, that new position that's been set up to deal with computer information technology.

We've yet to hear assurances from the Premier that the Public Affairs Bureau is not a political arm of government but is in fact an arm of government that supports it in putting forward its policies and its programs so that the citizens of Alberta know what the resources are that are being provided by the government. Now, there is a very distinct difference, as I'm sure the members on the opposite side recognize. However, I've yet to see any assurances that there is a differentiation of function.

I'm glad it's the Provincial Treasurer that sat in for the Premier, because I'm sure that when he took a good look at the Executive Council budget, as he must have done in order to have been able to respond, he would have noticed that when it comes to the office of the Premier, general administration, there are no goals, objectives, or strategies, that when we look at the Public Affairs Bureau business plan, it's sketchy to say the least. I know that given the background of the Treasurer in the Department of Labour, it would not have been acceptable if the Department of Labour had put forward this kind of a business plan and if the Department of Labour had put forward estimates as we see in the Executive Council figures.

When you look at Executive Council – and as I said, I know that the Treasurer has looked at Executive Council – we have maybe 12 lines all told for a budget of \$13 million. There are no breakdowns within those budgets. The FTEs are gross numbers. It leaves much to question. I'm sure that as part of the response I'm going to be getting in the detailed responses that will be forthcoming from the Premier's office, there will be assurances that in next year's budget, we will see those goals, objectives, and strategies, we will see some measurements so that we can in fact see whether or not Albertans are getting value for their dollar. That is something that I know the Treasurer is very interested in.

Now, the office of the CIO. The Treasurer had indicated that it's very different from freedom of information and that what this office will do is look at ensuring that we are on that information highway. One of the assurances we are looking for is that this government will not on that information highway sell information – that is, information that is Albertans' information – and that that will not be a basis for user fees, which, as the Treasurer likes to say, brings me to my next topic of discussion: user fees.

Has the Premier's office as a centralized function looked at the number of user fees, licences, and premiums and the impact that has on Albertans? Has the Premier's office done that? As I've talked about in other department estimates, there does not seem to have been that particular study done. Perhaps that's something that the Public Affairs Bureau can turn their attention towards.

The Treasurer had indicated that it's been four years since the last polls were taken. Somehow I find that stretches credibility. Perhaps the Public Affairs Bureau has not taken the polls, but individuals are seconded from the Public Affairs Bureau to departments. The department of transportation has an individual seconded from the Public Affairs Bureau, the department of public

works, the department of environment, the Department of Energy, the Department of Labour, and those departments have, I'm sure, at some point over the last four years taken some kind of poll or survey. In fact, when you look at the budget plans, they all indicate that there have been surveys taken. Nearly every single department in here says that there has been a survey done on something or other. We are asking that those surveys be tabled. We are asking that the questions be tabled and that the answers be tabled.

If there are any other kinds of polls or surveys that have been done, then the Premier has every year – I checked the past *Hansards* since 1993 – in Executive Council made the commitment that those polls would be available. Again, the Treasurer did make that commitment that we would be able to see the polls. The tiny glitch about the contracts – well, when a contract is made, there are two parties to that contract. If the Public Affairs Bureau puts into the contract that it's okay to release that information to the Official Opposition, then it should be okay.

Job descriptions. The Treasurer talked at length about Mr. Samoil, I believe, who's the chief information officer. That he has those credentials is laudable. The question is: why was there no job posting? If he's that eminently qualified, then he would have got the position. Was there a job posting, and if not, why not?

The other question I have is that I know in public works we're going to be spending 5 and a half million dollars – let me just get the words right here – in capital funding for the “implementation of new cross-government financial and human resource software systems” which will allow the government to do a couple of things. Is the chief information officer out of the Executive Council the individual that will then be responsible for the implementation of that \$5.5 million in capital funding? Is that committee that the Treasurer indicated has now been set up with information officers from each department then the one that this \$5.5 million pot will go to so that the distribution can be made within the different departments? If not, then again in his role as Treasurer, not as Premier . . . [interjections] Acting Premier is the term. Got it. I'm getting some help from my colleagues that's confusing me on the proper term. But as Acting Premier the Treasurer would, I think, want to find out exactly what is happening with computer and information technology across the system.

8:30

The other area that there are overlaps in is the Northern Alberta Development Council, which has, when you look at it, objectives that very much overlap advanced education and economic development. So again from a perspective of looking at where the best dollars are spent and where the best effect is, I think the Treasurer would want to also know those answers. Why do we continue to have an overlap, especially when my understanding is that there was at one point a sunset clause on the Northern Alberta Development Council? Given that, when you look at last year's *Hansard*, the chair at that point in time – and it's in *Hansard* – admitted to not knowing what the boundaries were of the Northern Alberta Development Council. When asked as to what areas constituted northern Alberta, he indicated that he didn't know. If there are now boundaries, then please table those, because last year in *Hansard* it was very clear: it was not there.

The other question that I have – and I don't see that there are any dollars allocated to this, so this is a question mark – is about the statistics that are used by the Premier in determining certain actions. About four years ago the department of statistics – and

I think at that time it might have been under Executive Council, though I could be mistaken – was closed down, and each area was supposed to be able to gather statistics. I think that is a function within this government that is sorely lacking, and in order for the Public Affairs Bureau to adequately do its work, it may be an area where the Premier wants to reconsider a decision that was made approximately four years ago to close down the department of statistics.

Now, there is one other question that I have with regards to appointments to boards and how those are made. About two and a half to three years ago the Premier had indicated that he would not be adverse to having a publication that indicated what all the potential appointments are that are coming up in a year and what their qualifications were so that if, for instance, someone in your constituency wanted to be appointed to a particular board, they could then pick up this binder from a government office or from your constituency office and they could look through and see if in September of 1997 this position is becoming available and in October of 1997 this position is becoming available, January of 1998 that position is becoming available. Those who were active in municipal government know that that exists, that there is a very well-defined process as to how appointments to boards are made. Again, the Premier about two and a half to three years ago indicated that he didn't see that there was much problem with that, but I have yet to see that being enacted. I would think that's something that the Public Affairs Bureau could very easily do under their mandate of government information to Albertans. Especially with the ease with which computer technology is now available, it could quite easily be put on to the web site, and that information could be there for all Albertans to avail themselves of.

I will at this point leave some time so that my colleagues can also ask questions that I may not have asked. Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just have a few questions because I know a couple of my other colleagues would like to ask a few. I just wanted to know if the Premier's office could provide an updated list of employees within the office of Premier and Executive Council by title and location. Because when somebody calls, they'll say: I called the Premier's office and he never talked to me. Well, that's understandable. There are thousands of people, I'm sure, who call the Premier every year, and he can't be expected to. So what is the pecking order when someone calls? Maybe we can tell them exactly who to call and who they should speak to if they know they can't get ahold of the Premier.

Another thing that I would like to see a little more of a breakdown of under the Premier's office would be things like salaries for nonpermanent and permanent positions, especially travel expenses. I think we all realize the Premier has a huge job to do, and I think it isn't unreasonable that he has travel expenses, but I think that is something that the public should have every right to see.

Just before I hand it over to the Chair to give to other colleagues, I did want to speak a bit about the Northern Alberta Development Council to the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca. Within that mandate I'm wondering if some things are being looked at, like 911 across the province. It isn't consistent across the province, as you know.

I think another thing that would certainly aid northern development – and I've spoken about it before in this House and I'll speak again – is getting involved with the powers that be about long-distance calls between different towns. I know many of you come from areas where it's long distance and it's only 15 miles away. So I think if we look at something like that under the Northern Alberta Development Council.

I do think the bursaries are a wonderful idea. The information on those bursaries and who can apply for them: if that would be available to all constituency offices, that would be good. I'd certainly appreciate that, unless – my jurisdiction doesn't fall under the Northern Alberta Development Council. I think it would. It doesn't? I'm not northern enough. Well, is it available? Okay. Then I would ask that it is available in all constituency offices. How do you make it known that people can apply for these? Because I do think they're a good option.

I'm also wondering about an issue that I think has certainly affected people in northern Alberta this year: the price of gas and propane. I even had calls, being in my portfolio with transportation and utilities, about people who could not afford the skyrocketing prices. Is that something you deal with within that?

Northern development of highways is another issue that I would assume is within that mandate, particularly along the lines of development, which highways are being developed, which would also tie in with the northern development. Certainly Fort McMurray to Peace River I think should be looked at. Also, of course, feeding into that is highway 794, which certainly needs upgrading, and highway 37. So with those few points I'm sure everybody in this House will soon be begging the minister of transportation to widen her highways so she'll stop talking about it.

With those few comments I will turn it over to the Chair.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. My questions will centre around the Public Affairs Bureau, further to the questions of my colleagues who posed questions about who these people are and what they do for a living. I have some observations here. I have no other information to go on and never have. I surmise from page 206 of the estimates a reduction of overall staff by 7 percent, or 10 full-time equivalents. A little mathematics gets me to about 143 people in the area. I heard the Acting Premier – it has a nice ring; doesn't it Stockwell? – say earlier that 11 persons who were employed in the publications service and perhaps another 20 or so, maybe as many as 30, in the RITE system would leave in the order of, oh, between 100 and 110 people, for a sum of some \$6 million. That number nets an amount of perhaps as low as \$55,000 in salary for each and every one of these people.

As I recall, these people are quite highly paid in large measure, which would lead me to believe that not only the reporting mechanism by which these people are employed and their location throughout the administration – it leads me to believe that the administrative costs, i.e. their computers, the cost of their offices, some travel expense, and the other sundry costs of paper, secretarial, and that sort of thing, are actually handled outside this department and outside this operating budget. That being the case, it seems to me that there's a great deal of money being spent by these – some would call them the promoters of government; others would call them the propaganda arm. There are many,

many terms that have been used in some recent publications, that I needn't remind the Acting Premier of.

8:40

The questions relate to these. How many of these people during the recent provincial election, between the 11th of February and the 11th of March, actually took holidays or took leave without pay in order to do something else creative? The reason I ask this is because I know who a great number of these people are from being in and around Edmonton and around provincial governments for a long time and recognize them to be staunch party members, card-carrying members, and assisting in many, many different areas in campaigns in this city and perhaps in others. I am always concerned that these people are servants of the party as opposed to the government and would like some assurances, and I'd like to see some rules of operation in governing this particular area of the Executive Council to be reviewed.

In recognizing that there's limited time here, I'll have to make way.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Since I have only five minutes – and I guess now there are even less – I will limit my comments and questions to the Public Affairs Bureau section of the Premier's office and the estimates there. The hon. Treasurer has obviously tried to reassure the House that the role of the Public Affairs Bureau is strictly providing information and is nonpolitical. In the context of what this government has been engaged in doing over the last four years – it's claimed credit for reinventing the government. It claims obviously to have undertaken a very large-scale restructuring of the health care system, education system, and its own departments. The line between the strictly government business and the political motivation that drives that effort of the government is obviously rather fine. So the Public Affairs Bureau, I suppose, has certainly been providing information to Albertans on why they should lower their expectations of the government, why they should expect and perhaps bear the massive cuts in health care spending, education spending, social programs.

Our government has, of course, also undertaken large-scale privatization of its own activities. It has withdrawn itself from what I consider to be an important task of any government, of being committed to job creation. It has engaged in fairly large-scale deregulation in a variety of areas of private and public economic activity. It has certainly built an image of Alberta as being a place where foreign companies and foreign capital are welcome and should come because Alberta has a certain advantage, the notion of the Alberta advantage.

In all of this clearly the government has been relying on its Public Affairs Bureau to provide the information that is needed both to persuade Albertans to accept the kind of program the government has been engaged in and also, of course, to provide information to outside agencies, corporations, transnationals to come and set up business here.

Now that we are at the point in this process of reinventing Alberta by this government where I guess most of the job is done and we may be into a new era, I wonder if you still need the Public Affairs Bureau. What I don't find mentioned in the business plan is any suggestion with respect to the need to dramatically downsize this part of the Premier's office. The job having already been done now of convincing Albertans of what

needed to be done, I think it might be a good time to tell Albertans that it's time to get rid of the public relations bureau. Another alternative, I guess, is to see how we can privatize the services that the Public Affairs Bureau has been offering. I guess the hon. Dr. West might be delighted to hear that. I wonder why his long arm hasn't reached into the confines of the Public Affairs Bureau. I hope he pays attention to it and gets rid of this rather expensive publicly funded exercise in privatization.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the 1997-98 business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Executive Council, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Executive Council
Operating Expense

\$13,514,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Advanced Education and Career Development

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would next like to call on the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would begin by making a reference to *Hansard*. We were in front of subcommittee A on Tuesday evening, April 29 . . .

Sorry. I got a little note here that said something about my wearing apparel.

MR. MAR: Tuck your shirt in.

MR. DUNFORD: My shirt is tucked in at the front. [interjection] Could we have some order in here, Madam Chairman?

Anyway, Madam Chairman, we had a very good evening in the sense that there was quite a number of questions that were brought forward both by members of the opposition and by colleagues of mine on the government side. I had hoped that we might have some of the answers here to discuss tonight, but unfortunately I'm not in that position. I will make the commitment that answers to the questions will be in writing and will be forwarded just as soon as they are available.

8:50

All members will have in front of them the department summary. I just want to refer to them briefly. We are talking here tonight, in terms of Advanced Education and Career Development, of a total amount voted for 1997-98 of \$1,192,822,000. These are significant amounts, Madam Chairman, and I'm really hoping they will receive the type of scrutiny that should be required for amounts of this magnitude.

You will note from the department summary that we also include the personnel administration office. We don't recognize this now as part of the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development, but we just felt that it was proper to present the information in this way, that it would be more convenient to everyone here in the Assembly.

What you have in front of you is a change in the forecast of an amount of \$162,000. I would just briefly like to make note of some of the major changes in the particular forecast in terms of both increases and reductions so that perhaps some of the questions will be more focused.

We have signed a labour force development agreement with the federal government, and this is providing – I'm sorry; I might have said \$162,000. I meant \$162 million. It does make a difference; doesn't it?

MR. WHITE: Small change. Don't worry about it.

MR. DUNFORD: The Member for Edmonton-Calder is quite rightly pointing out that zeros are not nothing; zeros do make quite a bit of difference.

So on the labour force development side we have \$106 million from the feds, and basically this is part of an ongoing initiative that you're seeing between the federal jurisdiction and the provinces where the provinces are picking up this responsibility. I'm proud to report tonight that Alberta was the first province to enter into such an agreement with the federal government. Of course, we're very proud of that fact and plan to administer our new responsibilities with all due regard and respect for the responsibility they've seen fit to give us.

We have a performance envelope funding of \$15 million. Again, for the benefit of the members in the House, we have just as recently as last Thursday sent out information to all of the chairmen of the boards of governors for the public-funded institutions and their presidents indicating how we would see the key performance indicators and the funding formula working. We are allowing them a period of time to respond, and we will then take those suggestions and put them into the mix and then see if we can arrive at a final performance funding mechanism, hopefully by July 1 of this year.

We have provided for an infrastructure renewal funding program of some \$50 million. By the way, this includes \$15 million of what we call the intellectual infrastructure program. The basic idea behind the infrastructure renewal is to assist with the maintaining and upgrading of the facilities that we currently have in the public institutions in our inventory.

Some of the major reduction areas. By the way, Madam Chairman, I've only covered a couple out of perhaps as many as 10 or 12 major increase areas. In the major reduction area we've taken a look at how we're delivering many of our services. Through some streamlining within the department, we've been able to actually arrive at some administrative cost savings. Just for the information, again, of members here in the Assembly, we've actually reduced by 44 full-time equivalents in our budget now over what was forecasted. Of those, 24 are from Advanced Education and Career Development and 20 from the personnel administration office.

So with those remarks, I would certainly be pleased to hear any further questions on our estimates and of course will provide answers in the normal fashion and as soon as we're able to come up with those answers.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Minister, for responding to the extent that you've been able to tonight. I heard you say that you had intended to have some

detailed notes in response to some of the questions posed a couple of weeks ago, on April 29. I guess I, too, was looking forward to that, and I share your disappointment, Mr. Minister, that we don't have those notes. Of course, it makes it very difficult to proceed to some extent. We're talking about a fairly large budget in a major portfolio, and this is our last opportunity to examine the budget. Anyway, point made, and it is a shame.

Mr. Minister I do have some follow-up questions though, so while we're anticipating the written responses, perhaps you could add these to the list. If there's anybody up in the gallery that's listening to this, I hope they don't take this personally that I'm just trying to make work for them. But I have do have a sincere desire . . .

MR. DUNFORD: No. We're all alone, Howard.

MR. SAPERS: It's just us; is it?

Well, under program 2.5, which deals with all the public colleges, I've been trying to get some more detail from some of the various colleges as to how they're managing to cope with what are essentially status quo budgets this year over last, given the fact that we've got union agreements being renegotiated, faculty association agreements being renegotiated, some upward pressure on wages, benefits, salaries. There's been a number of issues that have come up when I've been talking to college representatives about how they're coping. The stories I'm beginning to be told are things like, you know, the board of governors having the discretion to designate who's within, who's outside of scope when it comes to union agreements. The feeling is that these decisions are no longer being made on their merit, but they're now being driven entirely by financial pressures, and it's a little cheaper when you de-designate people and you can pay them less and erode their benefits, et cetera. I'm being told that this is happening over and over, not just at Lakeland College – and I know you're familiar with that case – but in several cases. Again, it's happening just because of financial pressure. I'm wondering whether or not you've heard the same complaints and, if so, how you're addressing them.

I'm also curious about the overwhelming sense I'm getting when I talk to college administrators, for the most part, that they feel absolutely compelled to make their programs operate on a cost recovery basis. Now, if college education were a business, that would be good, but college education, I guess, could also best be seen as an investment. We're already struggling to find a way to make it affordable for students, to make it affordable for the taxpayer, but I'm not sure that that particular argument can be won by downloading the cost entirely onto the student because of the pressure that the colleges are feeling to make their programs operate on a cost-recovery basis.

9:00

You know, there are a few examples, a couple out of Red Deer College. With the music program, I'm actually quite disappointed to see the direction there. I'm pleased that a way was found to save that program, because I understand it was on the chopping block, but I'm a little concerned that this program is somehow not seen as important, in fact that it may even be dismissed as being somewhat frivolous and that therefore it'd be okay to either let it go or make it operate on a cost-recovery basis. I don't think that that program is frivolous in the least, and I think it's a real shame that residents of central Alberta would be denied an opportunity to enroll in that program on the same basis, equal basis, as every other program which is not feeling perhaps as acute a pressure.

The engineering program, the program at Red Deer College that prepares students for transfer – most of the students have ended up transferring to the engineering department at the University of Calgary, but some of them go on to other faculties as well. This is sort of a double whammy that that program's feeling. First of all, there's the pressure because of the key performance indicators to get their completion rate up. They have to get the completion rate up as well because that helps generate the funding, so their standard is somewhat in jeopardy. If they have to artificially raise their standard, is it going to lower the quality? Is that being driven because of the market, if I can describe it that way, the market being those other institutions that will receive the students, or is it being driven because that college's administration feels it's the only way that they can cope with their budget constraints? Now, my own conclusion is that it's not being driven by the market. There's a 63 percent ceiling at the other facilities, yet this institution is having their standards compromised. So I'm wondering if you can illuminate this situation for me and explain how this budget will help address the program pressure on at least those two examples at that one college.

Some of the continuing education programs, Mr. Minister, are finding the same kind of pressure. The Minerva Senior Studies Institute at Grant MacEwan Community College is an excellent program. It's in its 11th year of operation. It has provided programming for hundreds if not thousands of seniors on an annual basis, a very well thought of, well regarded program. It involves lots of instructors. It has a shortfall right now. The college has always hosted the Minerva institute on a cost-recovery basis, and they're being told, as I understand it, that the life, the future of that program is in jeopardy because they're a few thousand dollars short in terms of external fund-raising.

Now, the immediate and obvious response is: well, hike the tuition fees again. But this is unacceptable. This would be hiking tuition fees for senior citizens. Mr. Minister, you can talk to your colleague the Minister of Community Development to have a greater understanding of how it is that our seniors really couldn't endure that. These programs offered through the institute have been described as life-saving programs, and I guess what's been meant by that is that they have given a new quality of life, a new meaning to getting out and participating for some seniors in the Edmonton area who otherwise really didn't have a lot of other opportunities to be vital and to be intellectually stimulated and to meet and work with other seniors and to continue their own lifelong learning. I'd hate to see this program put into jeopardy, Mr. Minister, yet I'm trying to figure out where in your budget that issue would be addressed.

We see as well, when we look at program 2.6, the funding for universities. You know, I've been talking to some senior faculty at the U of C and at the U of A, and they are excited when they talk to me about their plans for distance education. They are excited when they tell me about their curriculum development initiatives for distance learning. I have reason to be encouraged by what they tell me, but when I then talk to people at Athabasca, they tell me how threatened they are, how under siege they feel, how they believe that their institution is somehow coming in as the poor cousin to the other institutions, and that they're being pitted one against the other.

Again, I look at the fact that we've got, generally speaking, status quo funding for the universities. I mean, there are some adjustments here and there year over year, but generally speaking we're not looking at a huge adjustment. I'm wondering what it is you can pass along to me and through me to the people that are

worrying about the future of Athabasca University that would calm their particular concerns and would help me understand why it is that distance education is being pursued in such an aggressive way at some of the other facilities without necessarily cashing in on the expertise that's been developed through Athabasca. If I'm missing something in that equation, let me know. Mr. Minister, I hasten to add that I am not challenging the necessity of all of the universities to be involved in distance curriculum. I'm simply saying that we've got one university that in many respects its reason for being is distance education and developing those modalities. The other universities certainly have other and far more wide-ranging mandates. I'm just trying to figure out where the policy is taking us and how that policy is being evidenced through your budget.

Those are a couple of the comments that really I didn't feel were addressed when we had an opportunity to meet on the 29th.

Before I take my seat, though, Mr. Minister, I promised that I would relay this to you. It's in the Thursday, April 10 issue of *Gateway*, and I know you're familiar with the article. It's got your picture in it, and it's a good likeness of you, Mr. Minister. The question that was put to me was by a mixed group of faculty and students, just so you know. There's a pullout quote of you, Mr. Minister. The paper is quoting you:

I need to develop sources that are independent of the department, independent of student associations [and] independent of the Board of Governors.

The comment that was put to me was: "Well, I wonder who it is the minister wants to talk to? Is it people who just happen to drive by universities from time to time?" I thought: no, no; that wouldn't be the case.

But in my discussions with some of the stakeholders since our meeting on the 29th to go and get a better handle on what their concerns were about the budget and to see whether or not we needed to put some more flesh on the questions that we did ask you then, I just have to tell you that that quote was commented on a couple of times, and it did make people, even though they were maybe being a little bit tongue in cheek with that remark, just a little bit anxious about the development of an us/them kind of situation, as though faculty associations and student governments and boards of governors were somehow the them's and that because they represented those interest groups, their input wasn't going to be respected the same way as somebody who might be perceived by government to be more neutral. I'm sure that wasn't your intent, and I certainly would encourage you to seek as broad a source of information as you can, consult as broadly as you can, but certainly it can never be one in spite of the other or one group mutually exclusive of the other.

MR. DUNFORD: It was the context that was broad.

MR. SAPERS: Okay. I did comment that I would put that question to you when I met with these groups, so I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

I think some of my colleagues have a couple of other comments they'd like to share with you tonight.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I listened with interest to the minister's comments and his promise that we would get the answers to our questions in writing, and I thank him for that. Just so it's very clear, I would like to review what I think

are some of the questions that I'll be looking forward to receiving answers to, and I'll be brief in listing them.

9:10

I think it's important that we know whether or not the management model that the department is using has been evaluated or will be evaluated, whether the assumptions underlying that model were made explicit, particularly to elected members, before it was adopted, and how its continuing use will be modified, if there are any plans in that direction at all.

I asked what kind of an estimate or guesstimate there was in terms of what it was costing to develop the KPIs. It's part of that management instrument, and it has taken institutional time and individual instructors' time, and I think we have an obligation to know exactly how much that has cost us and is costing us.

I was interested in the poor and students from low socioeconomic areas in the province. I'd like some assurance. I'd like to know what kind of studies. I'd like to know how the department is directing resources to make sure that those students aren't systematically excluded as tuitions and loans rise. High tuition and high loan indebtedness scare off poor students, and I'd like to know what we're doing to make sure that that doesn't happen in this province.

I had asked what exactly, after Cloutier's criticism, the department has done to make sure that they can provide the kind of leadership in research that Cloutier referred to. You recall his criticism at that time was that there was no one in the department with the necessary background or skills that could offer leadership in research. I'd like to know how that has been remedied, particularly in this budget.

There's \$40 million in capital infrastructure money. I asked: what was the total amount of money requested by all these institutions? We've got bits and pieces of that information. Can you tell us exactly how many dollars institutions reckon it's going to take to meet their needs in terms of capital and infrastructure costs?

I wanted to know, Mr. Minister, about Athabasca University. It took an inordinate cut, a terrible budget slashing over the last couple of years. I was never apprised as to why that kind of cutting at that particular institution was necessary. It seemed to fly in the face of everything the government was saying about distance learning and the use of technology in learning in postsecondary education. Why was that cut made, and where and when will there be some attempt to make up for those cuts to that institution and the promise that I think it holds for postsecondary education in this province?

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

I wanted to know if the government had set participation rate goals for our high school students. We often compare ourselves with other provinces – Saskatchewan. We're proud that 40 percent, or whatever the figure is, of our high school students go on to take part in another program. Other jurisdictions do this differently. They set a standard, a goal that they want to meet. I think that this is particularly important when you look at the evidence that indicates that most of our postsecondary students in their lifetime, the graduates are going to have to have some kind of postsecondary training or postschool training. What consideration has been given to setting some sort of a standard for the province, a long-term goal so that our institutions know where we're headed and that the institutions that feed those postsecondary schools take on the obligation for getting them there and for preparing them for further kinds of education?

Finally, we talked earlier today about the Alberta vocational colleges. I wanted to know if there had been some consideration given to electing those boards. I think of the visit to Lac La Biche and the strong input that that community had into the move from a college that was directed and managed out of Edmonton to one that had a board management, how much they had thought that was a very necessary thing to happen to their AVC if it was to grow and to be maintained and to offer the kinds of programs that they saw necessary for their students. There was a great deal of public input and interest if the local press reflects that interest. So I would like to know if there has been any consideration to electing rather than appointing those board members.

Of course, that's a consideration we would have, Mr. Minister, for all the institutions across the province. We're moving in regional health authorities to partially appointed, partially elected boards. Has that kind of model be considered for our postsecondary institutions, where it would seem to make some sense?

One of the questions I didn't get to ask the last time is about the whole move to the centralizing of control in advanced education, and I point to the KPIs and to the access fund as two moves that put more power in the minister's office and how that seems to contradict what's happening in the K to 12 system, where some would argue that at least on the face of it the move to site-based management tends to give local people, those people affected by decisions some power over the decisions that are going to affect their lives. I listened with interest not too long ago in this House, a couple of weeks ago, to the minister of transportation speak quite eloquently about how the best decisions are made on site, that the best decisions are local decisions. Again, it seems to me that that kind of rhetoric and the action of the Department of Education, K to 12, contradicts what's happening in Advanced Education and Career Development.

So those are my questions, Mr. Chairman. I've listed them, and I'll keep them at the ready and look forward to a response from the minister.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few short questions of the minister that are specific to my riding. I mentioned this in public works, and I know you'll be working with the minister of public works on this, but . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Not the highway.

MRS. SOETAERT: No, it's not the highway. I'm not actually mentioning highway 794 in this little speech, though it is a route that many people use on their way to colleges and universities from Sturgeon. However, I really hadn't had it down on my little list here.

I do want to ask the minister if he is looking into the Westerra campus and what's happening there, if there are any programs going to be offered there and what's in the works? It's a wonderful facility that I hate to see just be an empty mausoleum and eventually destroyed like the old Sturgeon hospital.

The other concern I have, Mr. Minister, if you could look into it – actually, you'll be getting a letter from my office about this. The Alberta Vocational College in Spruce Grove is very respected and has many students from the Alexander First Nations band in my riding. It seems that they have been audited at, I would venture to say, a higher rate than any other clientele. [interjec-

tion] Audited. Their student loans. My office, I know, is in touch with your department on that. Parents of three or four or five children seemed particularly to almost be singled out to be continually audited, and they would provide the information and still not get approval, even though they had received original approval.

9:20

I don't know if I'm making myself clear, but it does seem almost discriminatory, and I know that's certainly not the minister's intention. I don't know what's happened, and as a result of that I have three people from my riding that actually have dropped out just months before they were going to graduate with their high school diplomas. I know that is of grave concern to you and to me as well, so you will be getting correspondence from me. We are working with your department on that. It just seems that they're almost singled out, and I know that's not the intention of you or your department. Maybe I can just flag that for the minister to look into.

Those were the only two points I wanted to make, though I was glad to get in the 794 point. So with that, Mr. Chairman, I'll allow others to speak.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again with only a few minutes at my disposal, I'll simply acknowledge here the minister's good humour the other day when we were in a meeting when we first went over his estimates. I thank him for his co-operative and friendly posture there.

AN HON. MEMBER: He had a bad day that day.

DR. PANNU: I think that's probably the case.

All I can do is reiterate very quickly a few of the concerns I made mention of on that day. Mr. Minister, one of the main concerns that I had had to do with the very feeble, if any, signs of reinvestment in postsecondary education that I saw in the budget. Cutbacks in the budgets over the last few years have meant downloading of costs throughout the postsecondary system, and the ultimate recipients of this downloading have been of course the students by and large. That remains a very major concern to me and all of us, I hope.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

I made one request the other day when discussing the estimates, and that had to do with whether the minister would direct his department to undertake a thorough going, large-scale study on the impact of increasing student debt loads and increasing tuition fees and other educational costs, costs of going to school, on accessibility to students of our postsecondary education system. Here I should mention perhaps the case of rural students in particular who have to leave their residences and their communities and take up residence in towns and cities far and away from their places. So they not only have to bear increasing tuition fee costs, textbook costs but also have to then worry about paying rent, and this adds to their overall cost of going to school: the impact of these increased costs on accessibility for all students but particularly those who live in rural areas and those who come from income backgrounds where parents can ill afford to subsidize their attendance at postsecondary institutions.

The other day I was talking with some members of a university faculty. One of the questions that comes up again and again has to do with: can we expect this government to raise the basic funding formula for the universities? The basic funding formula has not changed for some time. The universities, colleges, and other postsecondary institutions have serious financial pressures, so one of the questions that often crops up is: is there any hope of any increase in the basic funding formula? I leave this question with you. I hope you'll answer it in good time.

Postsecondary institutions and particularly research-oriented postsecondary institutions have been under very severe financial pressures. The question of retaining world-class faculty is a very major concern to departments, faculties, and university administrations especially in this particular period when most universities across Canada and other places as well are in the phase of recruiting new faculties. So the competition for good and outstanding faculty is rapidly increasing, and the lures to those who are already established but have become well-known scholars to other places is also becoming strong. So that's an important concern that doesn't seem to be addressed in the estimates that you have brought before us.

The last point that I would like to make is that I made a request on that day, and I hope, Mr. Minister, you will pay attention to it. I wonder if the departmental estimates can be in fact brought in numbers that are adjusted to inflation so that we can look at the real dollars available each year the budget is presented so that we don't have to waste time quibbling with each other over whether or not the real value of the budgeted amounts is this or that. I wonder if that change can be made to the budget estimates.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the 1997-98 business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating expense	\$1,192,822,000
Capital investment	\$1,525,000
Nonbudgetary disbursements	\$61,216,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

MRS. BLACK: Madam Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Executive Council and the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998, reports the approval of the following estimates, and requests leave to sit again.

Executive Council: \$13,514,000 for operating expense.

Advanced Education and Career Development: \$1,192,822,000 for operating expense, \$1,525,000 for capital investment, \$61,216,000 for nonbudgetary disbursements.

9:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We might have a slight mix-up in the backfield here. Bear with us for a minute. Well, I don't know. Hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, would you mind coming up and talking to the Parliamentary Counsel for a moment.

It seems everything is settled. All those in favour of the report, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed if any, say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

[On motion, the Assembly resolved itself into Committee of the Whole]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Committee of the Whole**

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I call the committee to order.

Bill 1
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 1997

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. [interjections] What? Am I going to get to talk later?

MS GRAHAM: Madam Chairman, I would like to speak at this time to Committee of the Whole as the sponsor of the Bill.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, in effect you are the sponsor of the Bill, so I'm sorry I didn't see you.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's okay. She's the sponsor of that Bill. I'm graciously handing over to you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MS GRAHAM: Well, Madam Chairman, it is my privilege to rise again to speak in support of Bill 1 in this Committee of the Whole with respect to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 1997.

Madam Chairman, the opposition raised several questions in the House during second reading of Bill 1. Essentially their concerns have been centred around two key areas: the application of the Act to public colleges, firstly; and secondly, the timing of the extension of the Act to local public bodies. At this time, I would like to correct some of the factual misinformation suggested by the opposition and to set the record straight.

The first matter I would like to address has been raised by several members of the opposition. That matter is private colleges being subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Madam Chairman, there are several good reasons why private colleges should not be included in the extension of freedom of information and protection of privacy to local public bodies.

The issue of what should be included under the Act is not a new one, and it would be helpful to look at some precedents to make matters a little clearer for certain members. When deciding whether boards, agencies, or commissions should be included in the freedom of information and protection of privacy regulation, certain criteria were used. Section 88(2)(b) of the Act provides these criteria, and it provides for the removal of a body from the regulation if one of these conditions exists: firstly, if the government does not hold a controlling interest in the capital of a body; secondly, if the government does not appoint a majority of members to the governing board; or thirdly, if the government does not exercise a similar control over a body. Madam Chairman, private colleges clearly meet the criteria of section 88(2)(b) as I've just described, and therefore they should not have the scope of the Act extended to them.

On May 7 the members for Lethbridge-East and Edmonton-Mill Woods raised the point that if private colleges are using public dollars, they should be subject to this Act. Well, Madam Chairman, let me first state that private colleges receive much less funding than public colleges from the government. In fact, the government funding for operational purposes for 1996-97 for private colleges was \$8.9 million compared to public postsecondary funding of \$735 million, and that equates to 1.2 percent of government funding for postsecondary institutions. But that is not the whole story. It is true that many private organizations and individuals receive government grants for many different types of programs; however, in these cases, Madam Chairman, government departments are accountable concerning the implementation of these programs that the funds are used for, and department records regarding those programs are readily available to the public.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development's records concerning both the public funding and auditing of private colleges will still be accessible under the freedom of information Act. Furthermore, the four degree-granting private colleges in Alberta provide three-year business plans and reports on the use of the public funds to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. In addition, these colleges also file reports to the Private Colleges Accreditation Board, which is presently and will continue to be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The net effect of this is that there is financial accountability already existing with respect to public dollars granted by government to private colleges. So the concern of the various opposition members, raised on more than one occasion, is already answered by the existing reporting requirements.

Another reason, Madam Chairman, why private colleges should not be subject to the Act is because the government does not control the appointment of the boards of governors to these institutions. As well, the government does not take control of any assets if one of these colleges is wound down. I would further like to state for informational purposes that private colleges in British Columbia and Ontario are not subject to their provinces' freedom of information legislation.

Thus, Madam Chairman, the decision not to include private

colleges in the Act follows a precedent already established in the Act, follows precedents already established in other provinces, and in no way diminishes the accountability private colleges have for any public dollars they spend, which is of course of concern to the government as well as the opposition members.

9:40

The second major issue that the opposition has raised is the matter of the timing of the extension of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation to local public bodies. Madam Chairman, since the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act has been proclaimed, there has been a very high rate of success in providing information to Albertans within the proper time frame. I am sure that members of the opposition would want this record to continue, and it will only continue with consultation with the groups affected by this legislation. Currently, local public bodies across the province . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I'm having trouble hearing. Could we try to keep it down some. Thank you.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

At this time, local public bodies across this province are in different stages of readiness for this legislation. As I have mentioned before in speaking in support of this Bill, school jurisdictions have indicated that they should be ready by the fall of 1998. However, some municipalities have indicated and expressed concerns that they may not be ready until 1999, so the question is: why should the extension of the Act wait for all sectors if some will be ready sooner than others? Madam Chairman, this government believes that the answer to that question is that we shouldn't wait. That is why we have Bill 1, and that is why phased extension is the logical conclusion to having an effective system available to Albertans where possible as soon as possible.

One further reason, Madam Chairman, for the phased-in approach being proposed by the government is that the government will be directly assisting many of these local public bodies in implementing this legislation. What this means is that the province will be assisting these local public bodies in preparing training programs, the preparation of directories, and the provision of guidelines. It is this government's intention to use our resources effectively and efficiently, so it makes sense to dedicate our resources to each sector as it becomes ready.

Madam Chairman, opposition members have also brought up several other issues that I would like to take this opportunity to respond to. On April 22 the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* brought up the issue of the Information and Privacy Commissioner also holding the position as the province's Ethics Commissioner. I would like to point out that to date there has only been one case where the appointment of an adjudicator was required due to a conflict between the two offices, and although there is a second pending adjudicator hearing, this is because of a conflict with the commissioner's previous appointment as the head of the Special Waste Management Corporation, which is the type of conflict which could have occurred with any individual who has had public-sector experience in Alberta prior to becoming the Information and Privacy Commissioner. It is also notable, Madam Chairman, that the present commissioner's appointment will be considered by the Legislature's Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in September of this year, and I would imagine that if the opposition has any concerns regarding this matter, they will raise them during the committee's meetings in September.

Madam Chairman, the hon. members from the opposition have also brought up the issue of the up-front application fees for information. As I mentioned in my original speech on this Bill, the cost to administer and implement the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act was \$3.5 million in the 1995-96 fiscal year. In that same time frame the fees collected relating to the information requests totaled \$9,211. So as you can see, Madam Chairman, the cost of administering this Act is substantial, and it is quite obvious that the fees charged with regards to this Bill are extremely reasonable.

MRS. SOETAERT: Compare that to other provinces; why don't you?

MS GRAHAM: I would like to do that. I, in fact, would like to compare the FOIP fees in Alberta with the Ontario FOIP fees, which was again an issue raised by the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, who brought forward an example claiming that when Ontario raised its FOIP fees, there was a drop of 50 percent in the number of requests for information. However, when one investigates the situation a little further, Madam Chairman, one finds out that this is not quite the case as described by the hon. member. Based on preliminary figures supplied by the Ontario commissioner's office, the number of access requests in the provincial sector went from 11,600 in 1995 to 9,260 in 1996. This is not a drop of 50 percent, as was suggested by the hon. member. I am sure that the hon. member is also aware that at the time there was this drop in requests, it was a time when the Ontario Act had been amended to remove the employment-related records from the scope of the Act. This undoubtedly had the effect of decreasing the number of access requests. I'm sure the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* is also aware that early in 1996 Ontario public servants went on strike, another factor leading to the decrease in the number of requests.

Madam Chairman, the last point I would like to deal with is section 21 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This is the section that the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* calls the Mack truck clause. This section deals with advice to officials. The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* seems to think that this section allows the government to hide all kinds of deep, dark secrets. However, this is simply not the case. If one has regard to the recently tabled annual report for the information management and privacy branch, it is stated that of the 980 requests for information completed in the 1995 fiscal year, only in two cases was section 21 cited as the reason for declining to disclose information. Thus, one can hardly characterize section 21 as a Mack truck clause, and it is clear that the argument made by the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* is without substance.

In conclusion, Madam Chairman, I would like to state that freedom of information and protection of privacy is a priority for this government. Bill 1 extends the scope of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to include schools, health authorities, postsecondary institutions, and other local public bodies. It provides the extension process with the needed flexibility to address the varying situations in the various sectors.

Madam Chairman, I am pleased that I've had the opportunity to debate this Bill. I hope that all members appreciate its significance, and I look forward to their full support.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I listened with interest to the defence for excluding private colleges from the FOIP legislation, and it strikes me that there wasn't much, if any, talk about students and instructors and staff that are affected by this decision. If you go back to the original purposes of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the purposes of the Act are very, very clear. Section 2(a) has it. It says:

To allow any person a right of access to the records in the custody or under the control of a public body subject to limited and specific exceptions as set out in this Act.

So it's those students, it's those professors, it's those instructors, it's those administrators, it's those workers at those institutions that are being denied access to personal information. I don't think you pass over those people lightly, because surely the Act was intended to protect them.

9:50

If you look further in the purposes of it, it's to allow those individuals, "subject to limited and specific exceptions as set out in this Act, a right of access to personal information about themselves" that might be held, and it says, "by a public body." I think you can argue that institutions that spend close to \$9 million of taxpayers' money can't get away with calling themselves exclusively private institutions and hiding under that kind of an umbrella.

If you go on further, they "allow individuals a right to request corrections to personal information about themselves that is held by a public body." If you work in one of those institutions, you realize just how much information they do have about individuals: their academic records, their personal records, records about their attitudes, records about their financial status. It seems incredible that a province, a government would have a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act that would exclude people having access to that information to correct it, to ensure its accuracy, to make sure that they are in no way being harmed by the kind of information that the institution holds.

The last one and the important one, particularly in an academic community, is "to provide for independent reviews of decisions made by public bodies under this Act and the resolution of complaints under this Act," because those institutions daily make decisions about students and their lives and the lives of faculty and other staff members. Often the source of much of the difficulty is that those people don't have access to the same information that the institutions have and use too often to their detriment.

I would really hope that the government would look at this whole Act and this particular portion of the Act from the perspective of the students and the people that are involved in those institutions. I think that's what the Act was intended to protect and to serve, and this amendment doesn't do it.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 1 in committee. I have to express some concerns, especially with the comments made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the sponsor of the Bill.

AN HON. MEMBER: Say it ain't so, Colleen. Say it ain't so.

MRS. SOETAERT: It is so that I'm disappointed.

The thing is that this Bill is touted as this great piece of

legislation about openness and accountability, number one Bill for the Premier, yet it's nothing but hot air.

MR. SAPERS: Ralph air.

MRS. SOETAERT: Ralph air? Hot Tory air? No, just hot air.

Virtually what it says, Madam Chairman, is that all you guys that we were going to put under freedom of information, well, we're going to let you pick the time that you want to come under freedom of information. That's not leadership, and we expect more from this government, and we certainly expect more from this piece of legislation.

Now, the hon. member said that private colleges file a report to the minister. Then she pointed out that people on the government side and people in the opposition want to know that information. Well, of course we do, but just because it's filed with the minister doesn't mean we get to see that information. So certainly it's time that private colleges are put under the freedom of information and protection Act.

Maybe \$8.7 million doesn't mean much to members across the way, but I would think that if they cared that much about the dollars, just a mere \$8.7 million – and that is sarcasm because you can't read sarcasm – then why aren't those colleges under the domain of freedom of information? I think that's a very simple request, and I would venture to say that most private colleges wouldn't have a problem doing that. I've seen the Treasurer out at fund-raisers for Concordia College that I've been at, and I would venture to say that they would have no problem sharing their books with the Legislature and being part of the domain that Bill 1 should include, though it doesn't.

I would say that as taxpayers we have a right to know how our money is being spent. It's that simple. If I am giving tax dollars to something, where is it going and how is it being spent? If private colleges get \$8.7 million, then I deserve to know where that money goes. Where is the money? There's that theme again. Where is the money? [interjection] No, it's not to the same tune as where's the beef. That Bill was earlier today. One of our vegetarian members spoke to that one.

Back to freedom of information for a moment, Madam Chairman. I do have concerns that each sector – municipalities, universities, schools, hospitals – can kind of pick and choose when they can fall into this legislation. I think the government in having this as their first Bill should say: hey, guys, we want to see your books this year; certainly that information is there, so why can't we see it?

I am disappointed in the answers I received in response to our concerns in second reading. They seem to have talked around the issue and certainly have not answered our concerns, and I'm surprised that more members on that side don't want to know where those dollars are going. Then when they say that it comes here for the budget process and certain dollars that are allotted by the government to private colleges are debated in budget estimates, well, that's a joke. We all know the process that we get for really analyzing the budget here. We are double-booked in different committees and have to be two places at once and don't get to speak the amount of time that we would like. Her response, too, that we should get the information from the budget process is not a fair response because we just don't get that information from the budget process.

When things are done in secret, Madam Chairman, they degenerate. Unless things are aboveboard and people can see where the money is being spent, then there must be some deep,

dark secrets. I listened attentively to the member, and all she could say was: it isn't a deep, dark secret. But she couldn't tell me why it wasn't. It is Committee of the Whole, and she can respond at any time. I would quite appreciate that, if she could respond against some of my concerns. I heard: it's not a deep, dark secret, but I didn't hear why. I heard that reports are filed to the minister, but we don't get to see them. I want to. That's representing my constituency. Many of the people in my constituency attend these private colleges. They want to know. They have the right.

Anyway, Madam Chairman, I think I've made a few points about this Bill that I am sure the hon. member will address. With that, I will allow my hon. colleagues a chance to speak to this in Committee of the Whole as well.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but before you begin, I have allowed a fair amount of leeway and latitude with the last two speakers. For especially the new members of the Assembly, when we are in committee stage, we do go through the Bill, if you desire, section by section, and I would ask that we try to stay to the Bill itself.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

10:00

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Chairman, for the direction. What I had most wanted to do at this juncture – I have some amendments to deal with – is first respond to the opening comments of the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who was allowed to actually range quite far in terms of talking about elements of Bill 1, some of the debate that had been heard. I'd like an opportunity, with your leave, to respond to some of those things, all with reference to Bill 1 of course and the provisions. I just wanted to alert you to that.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I believe I said I allowed latitude for the last two speakers. So that was certainly, you know, the one from our side and the last one from your side. So I would ask now – I know you have amendments – if we could stick to the sections of the Bill.

MR. DICKSON: Sure. Well, let me start off by saying this. One of the things we deal with when we look at Bill 1 in terms of specific amendments would be the provision to take out the reference to private colleges in section 2 of the Act. I think it becomes particularly significant, and we wonder: what's the import, the impact of this? It seems very clear to me that the provincial government has a very marked double standard when it comes to freedom of information.

The reason I say that, Madam Chairman, would be this. When the provincial government first implemented freedom of information on October 1, 1995 – and I'm looking specifically at section 2 of Bill 1 as I address this – the government started out by telling us that when freedom of information came in, this was going to be a whole new culture change, a culture of openness, that this was going to create an environment of transparency that hadn't existed hitherto in this province. I think Albertans were looking for that certainly after the Getty years in this province and the incredibly poor decisions that had been made. I think when we look at Bill 1 and when we hear the comments by Calgary-Lougheed, what we find is that the government has not embraced this new culture of openness. In fact, what we see is a very technical approach to freedom of information. We see one where the focus is on exclusion instead of inclusion.

Coming back to section 2, I think the point has already been made several times. I can put it no better than to paraphrase the government's Minister of Justice, Attorney General, Government House Leader, and Member for Calgary-Shaw, who, when we were on the freedom of information panel along with the Minister of Environmental Protection, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the Member for Peace River, and certainly some of my colleagues, argued that there's a price to be paid. If you come forward as a body and say, "I want tax dollars for my private college," there's a quid pro quo. There's a corresponding obligation. If you want tax dollars, there's a certain standard you have to meet. Part of that standard means that you have to be able to meet certain public responsibilities.

You know, if private colleges have a problem with freedom of information, they have a very simple response: don't ask for tax dollars. Step back and say: we're going to fund-raise privately. If they do that, Madam Chairman, then there's nothing that I or any other member of this Assembly can say. But they've chosen not to do that. What they want is to be able to attach themselves like a great big, ugly lamprey to the Provincial Treasurer and the booty of the Provincial Treasurer. Yet at the same time they don't want to be subject to a reasonable level of public scrutiny. Well, I don't think that's acceptable. You know, people who attend private colleges, I expect, would be embarrassed if they'd known the position that was taken in Bill 1. I think that's a big problem.

Now, the other part of Bill 1 that gives me concern when it comes to specific provisions would be this. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed is indulging in some mythology, and I say this with respect. What the Member for Calgary-Lougheed has said is: we're talking about how we can expand the Act. Well, the reality is that if all members look at section 1 of the freedom of information Act, you see reference to "local public body," and it describes what a local public body is. It includes health authorities and it includes universities and it includes colleges. They are already subject to the Act. Why are they in the Act? Because the unanimous recommendation of the all-party panel appointed by the Premier recommended that they all be part of the Act. The only question was the staging and when those different elements of local government would be subject to the Act. There has never been a question in this province ever on the government side and certainly in this Assembly whether or not they were going to be covered. They're already in.

There's no amendment here suddenly reaching out and bringing in colleges and universities that had previously been excluded. There's no extension to regional health authorities and different health authorities. They've always been in the Act since it was passed in the spring of 1994. They survived the government retraction and rollbacks of the statute in 1995. They're still there. They've always been there. So when I look at Bill 1, Madam Chairman, and when I turn my attention to section 3, the concern I have is – let's acknowledge that this isn't expanding the Act. All it's doing is allowing the government to pick and choose who is going to be covered and when.

Now, Madam Chairman, there's been much reference in weighing these two provisions, section 2 and section 3. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed was talking about the first report of freedom of information and protection of privacy. What she neglected to mention is that even though the Act came into force October 1, 1995, and the government of Alberta has statistics as recently as two months ago, the report only covers the first six months. The Act doesn't cover a full 12 months. The only thing we know from the Act for sure is that the government predictions and projections in terms of how many general access requests –

we've fallen so far short of those that it cries out for some explanation. The very best explanation I or anybody else who has observed, the closest they can come up with is high fees.

But getting back to section 2. Let all members be absolutely crystal clear on what this does. What it does is it creates no outside deadline when these different bodies are going to be subject to the Act. It allows the government to pick the smallest ones first. It allows them to defer regional health authorities that spend 2.2 billion tax dollars to the very end of the line. Well, Madam Chairman, Albertans are insisting and demanding that in fact they should be at the front of the line, that regional health authorities have to be subject to freedom of information and they have to be subject first, not last.

Many other specific concerns I wanted to make. I've got some amendments, Madam Chairman, but I just want to give a couple of other members an opportunity to speak generally to the different sections in Bill 1 before I start introducing my amendments.

Thanks very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before we do that, could I have the concurrence of the committee that we revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to introduce two young women in the gallery tonight. They've been watching this debate. Loreen Cornell is from the University of B.C. and graduated from NAIT in 1996. Teresa Larson has her CGA, and she now works for Norwest Soil Research Ltd. They're in the gallery watching these proceedings, and I think they're wondering about the different committee stages. I've relayed to them that this is a much more informal time than other times in the House. So I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

AN HON. MEMBER: Tell them to come down.

MRS. SOETAERT: Come on down.

10:10 **Bill 1**
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 1997
(*continued*)

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Committee stage on Bill 1, and I'm going to try to be very mindful of your ruling that we have to be talking about clause-by-clause sections of this Act. You know, it's a pretty thin Act if you take out the explanatory notes, but it's very, very wide ranging in what it will accomplish or what it will prevent. Certainly if you take note of the very first clause of Bill 1, it reads, "The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is amended by this Act." I mean, that

says a mouthful in that one little sentence; doesn't it?. What it does, of course, is say that you can talk about the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act by virtue of that section. So anything in that Act is really, as you know, Madam Chairman, fair game for comment. So I thank you for pointing out to us what our limits in debate might be.

What I wanted to enter into the debate at this stage were some comments that were put to me recently at a meeting that I attended with postsecondary student leaders from around the province. They were asking me about the government's intent for advanced education, and I said: well, you know, this government has a heck of a commitment to advanced education. You know how we can tell that they have this commitment to advanced education? Two of the first three Bills of this brand-new session of the Legislature deal with advanced education. Bill 1, which is the Bill we're discussing tonight in committee, is a Bill that deals directly with advanced education in that it would exclude private colleges from being subject to access to information laws and regulations. Of course we have Bill 3, which deals with the vocational colleges and defines in legislation what their mandate is.

The students were curious. They said: well, why is it that we're seeing all of this attention being paid to advanced education at this point? I was unable to provide them with a satisfactory answer, so I asked them why they thought Bill 1 was coming up and what they thought of it at this point. While they were somewhat puzzled as well as to why this Act would be on the Order Paper at this stage and why private colleges were being dealt with in a particular way, what they kept on coming back to was, you know: there were so many other issues in dealing with advanced education that these two being sort of flagships for the government were really curious.

They asked me for more detail. They asked me to explain why private colleges should be dealt with so differently. They asked me whether tax dollars were going to be well protected. They asked me whether, if they made the decision to transfer between their current advanced education facility and one of these others, it would make any difference. Would there be a full and open sharing of transcripts, of equivalencies? Would they be able to transfer as seamlessly as they would like to? Would there be some restriction on making information about staff and the qualifications of instructors available? Would there be some prohibition about the finances and the solvency of these colleges?

You know, while we are on that point, I'll just make quick note of an issue that was brought before this Chamber earlier this session, and that was the failure of the Rocky Mountain academy, a private institution that got itself into some difficulty, unfortunately for the operators of that institution but most unfortunate for the students of that institution. You know, the students told me about all of the difficulties they had in obtaining information about the Rocky Mountain academy, about getting certainty as to what they were licensed to provide and what they weren't licensed to provide, what the qualifications were, what the certification requirements were.

Madam Chairman, it took a meeting that I helped to arrange with the minister of advanced education just to get those questions on the table so they could be addressed, and the students are just now getting answers to their questions. That took a forced face-to-face meeting between the students and the minister to get those questions even raised and the information teased out of the department to the best we could. Now, imagine trying to explain

to these other students of the private colleges, the private schools, why each and every one of them should potentially be forced into face-to-face meetings with the minister to get their fairly basic information requests dealt with. They were not satisfied with that, nor should they be.

I listened to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed answer some of the earlier concerns addressed by the Bill, and I appreciate the sincerity and the effort in addressing the concerns. I have to report though, Madam Chairman, that unfortunately I am not persuaded. I think perhaps my response was clouded by my experience on the all-party task force that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo spoke of. I particularly remember going up to Fort McMurray and listening to the delegation from Keyano College coming in and talking to us about freedom of information and what they thought was good and bad, why they thought they should or shouldn't be subject to the Act, and when they thought they should or shouldn't be brought into the Act.

But, you know, nowhere in that discussion did anybody draw the distinction and say, "Well, this public institution and this private institution, both funded to some extent with tax dollars, should be treated differently." The students don't necessarily perceive them as different. The taxpayers who pay their tax dollars to the government, entrusting that the government will expend those tax dollars getting the best value and the most accountability, don't necessarily see them as different. And I'm not sure that we on that all-party task force ever contemplated that there should be a substantial difference in the reporting requirements, in the transparency expectations between these public and private institutions.

I can't separate my response to this Bill from that experience, so I can't find it within me to support this amendment given that there is no clear explanation. There still isn't really an understanding in my mind as to why this is happening.

There's a lot of uncertainty out there in general around privacy issues and confidentiality issues. There is a tremendous amount of uncertainty amongst postsecondary students about their own future and about what may happen in advanced education and about the increasing commercialization and privatization of advanced education. I don't want to be a party to anything, Madam Chairman, that would add to that anxiety or perhaps even help create that reality.

I'm looking forward to the debate on the amendments that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo is about to initiate, and perhaps in the give-and-take of that debate on the amendments these very reasonable amendments will be seen as satisfactory to the whole Assembly. Perhaps Bill 1 will be saved, perhaps we'll hear from

some of the members on the government side as to how the Bill's been improved, and maybe I'll be persuaded and my mind will change.

With that I will take my seat and welcome the intervention from either supporters of the Bill to help address these concerns or, notwithstanding that happening, we'll hear from my colleague and deal with the amendments.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to move we adjourn debate on this Bill.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur with this motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.
Hon. House leader.

MRS. BLACK: Madam Chairman, I move that we now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

10:20

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 1.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.
Hon. members, do you concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

[At 10:22 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]