

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, May 14, 1997 **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 97/05/14
 [Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

head: **Committee of Supply**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of Supply to order, and we'll start with the estimates of the department of transportation. This follows the same procedure that we have followed the last few nights with 20 minutes to the minister, 20 minutes to the opposition, and five minutes to the New Democratic Party.

If it's all right with the Assembly and the hon. minister, may we revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, hon. member.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. McFARLAND: Madam Chairman and also to the Minister of Justice, it gives me a good deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some gentlemen that have come up to visit with us today and host an informational meeting on water highways. They are members of the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association. I would ask that they stand. Stan Klassen is executive director and Keith Francis, the chairman, along with Clint Henrickson, Don Campbell, Jim Webber, Jim Brown, Jim Csabay, Pat Hemsing, Morris Zeinstra, Merv McCallum, Harold Unruh, Henry Holst, Gordon Zobell, and Rudy Kutsch. They're not all here, but please stand and receive our warm welcome.

head: **Main Estimates 1997-98**

Transportation and Utilities

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chairman. This may be a bit of an endurance, in which case we may not quite make the whole trip.

Nevertheless, first of all, I'd like to welcome the lads that certainly represent such a critical part of our agricultural community in the delivery of water to the communities. I do want to assure them, though, that we will not be paving the water highways, so you won't have to worry about that particular element.

I appreciate the opportunity of appearing before the committee and again hopefully responding to any additional questions that may come forward in the Committee of Supply. I appreciated the interest and the enthusiasm that came forward at the last Committee of Supply. I think there was a total of some 118 questions that we responded to. We've made an effort to respond to each and everyone of you personally or through the process of answering questions during the previous Committee of Supply.

Again, if we have time, we'll answer as many as we possibly can today, but if we don't, we assure you that we will give you a written submission to respond to your questions. Most of the questions that were asked last time involved specific departmental programs, such as traffic safety, maintenance contracting,

highway construction. Those were the key areas, although they covered virtually all of the areas that Transportation and Utilities covers, including the delivery of disaster service programming.

In order to answer your questions and to elaborate on these program areas, I'll deal with each program and relate the question in its entirety. Basically in light of the fact that I've answered the questions that were asked previously, I'll deal more with the general approach of each department that we have as far as Transportation and Utilities' portfolio is concerned.

The area that appears to have generated the most interest and the most discussion and has been under ongoing discussion as well is the whole area of traffic safety. Traffic safety has always been a concern of Alberta Transportation and Utilities, but in the past year there has been increased media and public attention on this particular area. There seems to be more focus in this particular area. On April 10 I announced that we're taking a stronger position and taking stronger measures to improve traffic safety in this province.

One of our first moves was to restructure our department to create a new traffic safety area within the department itself that'll be headed by ADM, as well as a whole grouping. What we've done is essentially move small elements of traffic safety from the various departments and put them all in one particular area. We feel we can deliver the service more efficiently, more effectively, and ultimately respond in a more effective manner as well. So that is the primary thrust behind doing that. We have more or less completed that now, and we feel that in the early stages it is responding in a much more effective manner than it used to before.

We brought together a team of people to work on the important issue under one umbrella, and this consists of driver services, formerly known as driver records; vehicle safety; carrier services; inspection services; disaster services; dangerous goods control. They're all within the new division. You'll find driver records, all classes of motor vehicle registrations, all classes of operating licences, commercial vehicle safety standards, commercial inspections, and compliance and audits all under this one department now.

Gary Boddez has assumed the position of assistant deputy minister for the newly created traffic safety service division. Gary comes to the department from Municipal Affairs, where he was the former ADM responsible for Alberta registries. Gary had also previously been the ADM responsible for finance and administration at Public Works and was the ADM for lotteries with the Gaming Commission. So he has good experience, a good knowledge base to work from.

One of the priorities of the new division is to work with other police agencies and school divisions to ensure that indeed we do have adequate school bus inspection as well as inspection standards that are applied consistently throughout the province. The concern was that perhaps we were not applying the standards equally throughout the province. We are trying to develop a consistent process whether it's north, south, east, west, urban, rural, whatever the case may be.

We want to ensure that random inspections of both school buses and commercial vehicles in this province take place, and that's the thrust that we are designing within this particular division of Transportation and Utilities. One of the methods is to increase random inspections. We've virtually now completed the hiring of 28 new transportation officers, and that will increase our complement of officers to 124. These transportation officers will focus specifically on traffic safety inspections and monitoring of all carriers and buses.

At this point I'd like to outline the roles and responsibilities of

these safety inspectors, as requested by one of the members at the last discussion. The transport officers conduct daily inspections on a random basis, and they basically come unannounced. There is no knowledge whatsoever that these people are going to be doing inspections prior to the actual inspection. They patrol the primary highways, and much of the work will be done right on the spot, right on the highway system. They'll be doing it at commercial vehicle inspection stations and at organized Check Stops as well so that indeed we have flexibility. People will have to be careful and not get into a stereotype process. These uniformed officers are located in 17 vehicle inspection stations and seven district offices across the province, and we also have one vehicle inspection auditor posted in each of the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer.

As a matter of information the vehicle inspection auditors are certified licensed mechanics who will follow up on problems identified by the department's transportation officers and Alberta Permit Pro. Alberta Permit Pro. is under contract to Alberta Transportation and Utilities. It audits vehicle inspection stations and the work performed by mechanics at these stations. Staff employed by Alberta Permit Pro. are licensed heavy-duty mechanics, and indeed they are trained for their job.

I'd like to respond to the question about what the additional transportation officers will be doing, whether they'll be doing inspections. While the department concentrates on inspection efforts on the primary highways, the secondary highways are the responsibility of the cities, counties, and municipal districts. In these cases police services and municipal officers take on the inspection duties, which include the Edmonton city police and the RCMP.

8:10

Let me explain how the Check Stops work. I'm sure that you're all familiar with the Check Stops operated by the various city police departments in the province. The Check Stops set up with our transportation officers are very similar, and we're basically going to be modeling on that particular delivery. We set up Check Stops on a regular basis throughout the province in safe locations where commercial truck traffic numbers warrant. Other considerations include the time of year when road bans may be in effect and when we can best use the efforts of the transportation officers.

As far as random school bus inspections are concerned, the transportation officers inspect an average of 80 buses a month, except in the months of May and June, in which case they double their inspection. It works out to be about 160 buses during those two time periods, which are very critical as far as transportation of schoolchildren is concerned.

In addition, on March 18, 1997 . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, it would certainly be all right with the Chair and, I'm sure, the Assembly if you wish to split up your 20 minutes. I understand that you're not feeling well.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Go ahead, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's only kind that we give you a chance to give your voice a rest. It's quite strenuous when you get one of those tough throat conditions that needs a break.

I just want to start with some comments on the budget on transportation. I want to start by commending the minister on some of the issues that he raised in terms of restructuring his department to give an increased focus on highway safety and the other safety issues that come under his control in terms of bus inspections. Events of the last little while have really shown that we've got to have that kind of increase. This is a good program, and again I commend the minister on that change.

As we go through the business plan and some of the budget items, there's a couple of issues that I wanted to raise in terms of the impact that these may have on some of the other aspects of the budget and the relationship to other activities that the government's responsible for. Your goals start off by outlining that you've got to have improvements in the strategic highway system and that this is the main focus on the export highway, some of the other trade areas. One of the things that a number of people have approached me about during discussions in many of the rural communities - there was a real issue that came up when they were planning the Highway 3 extension east from Lethbridge. It must be two years ago now. There was some concern about why they were going to put the four-lane right through the middle of Barnwell when a number of the people in Barnwell had asked for it to go around the community as a safety measure, yet the last I remember hearing was that now the plan was for it to go through the town based on certain decision criteria.

A number of people from that part of southern Alberta have called and asked what the rationale was for that kind of decision. We've always asked them to call the transportation department and find out what it was. I don't know if they did find out, because they never do call me back. I guess they must have got a satisfactory response, because I'm sure they would have asked me to continue to investigate on their behalf if they didn't, but it would be in my interest as well.

This is also an issue that we're seeing: Highway 2 south from Calgary. As you go through there, you stop. You have to go through Nanton and you have to go through Claresholm, a kind of slow down processes for the big trucks. Are you planning for changes in those that will allow them to have a bypass around those small towns? This is in terms of both the efficiency of the transportation network and safety for the residents of the towns as these big trucks come through.

The other issue that you talk about in your second goal is the rural transportation partnerships. Here you're dealing with the issues of how to improve the secondary highway and local road systems that are in the province, especially those that are feeders to the international trade routes and those that are used for tourism. The minister is quite well aware of some of the concerns that were raised while he was minister of agriculture about the impact that some of the concentrated agriculture industry is having on the local road systems. I would encourage him very strongly to work with the Municipal Affairs minister and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties to make sure that this kind of issue is addressed in a fair and equitable way so that we don't get disadvantages created in terms of the way we approach the issue of fund-raising for roadway support and maintenance.

There are some proposals out now being discussed by some of the rural municipalities that would, in some people's view, create a disequilibrium in the rural competitive advantage situation, put burdens on some groups like, say, the feed lot operators or the intensive livestock operators to the benefit, say, of the crop sector. So this has to be balanced and looked at. I was wonder-

ing if the minister is working with the rural counties and municipal districts to make sure that some kind of an equitable balance is put in place there. I know there are efforts ongoing within the Municipal Affairs ministry, and I just hope that you take the initiative and get involved there as well to make sure that kind of balance is put in place.

The other issue that comes up in terms of the export highway is the new northern development report that was just issued in terms of the highway and transportation systems up there. Is that going to be reflected in any changes in the next two- or three-year priorities as put forward by the minister?

Another aspect came out that I was very pleased to see. It was probably about a month ago when you distributed the information on all the highway upgrades and highway improvements and maintenance programs that were going to be provided across the province during this coming construction and maintenance year. I think that's a really great opportunity for those of us that have to interface with the local governments to be able to talk in an informed way about which programs you have in place, how you see them being scheduled in.

I guess the question that I would like to ask in connection with that set of information is how the minister deals with scaling and the relative importance: why this one instead of that one? We're still getting calls saying: well, you know, we thought our part of the highway should have been higher up the list than what it appears to be. It would be really helpful to have a little more information that would provide us with how you do the balancing between which parts of the highways get repaired or get upgraded, get a shoulder put on them this year, looking at it from the perspective in terms of how your department makes those weighting decisions and prioritizes the relative segments of the highway that need to be upgraded.

Again, I've been asked on behalf of one of my colleagues to remind you that highway 794 from the junction of 16X to Westlock does need to be repaired. So that's just a plug on behalf of one of my colleagues, and we'll see how that works out. It seems to be a concern of a lot of the people that live in that part of Alberta as to the extent to which that highway gets used. They feel that there's an abnormally large number of accidents in the severe to fatal classification relative to some of the other highways around, and they'd like that looked at in terms of the mechanism that you use for prioritizing highways for improvement. So they would like you to look at that.

A couple of more comments. Goal number 5, where you talk about managing the primary highway system. This deals with the maintenance and upgrading in the highway system, where you've contracted out a lot of that work now to the private sector. There have been some questions raised, again, from rural Albertans that call my office and want to know how this is working, why their road wasn't cleared as well as it was two years ago, these kinds of issues. I think it would be expedient on the minister's part to possibly publish a prototype of the contract that you put out in terms of the performance expectations you write into those contracts in terms of, say, how many hours after a severe snowfall before they are expected to have a highway cleared.

I mentioned to the minister one evening in a conversation we were having during committee stage that for the highway that passes my home, in the nine and a half years that I've been living there now, this winter was the first time in those nine and a half years that I had to go out and the road wasn't ploughed to the city of Lethbridge at 8 o'clock in the morning when I was going into town. That happened twice this year, and it hadn't happened in

the previous, effectively, eight and a half years that I'd been living there. [interjection] Well, that may be a possibility, Mr. Minister. He said that we had snow this year, and in southern Alberta we usually don't get snow. We do have the occasional snow drop in other years as well.

But it was a very noticeable difference. It could have been, as I recognize and I think everybody does, that when snowplow drivers go out, they have to give priority first to the school route areas and then the business route areas and then the subsequent ones after. It was a noticeable difference this year, so I think it would probably be to the minister's advantage if he was to make some of that kind of information public so that we could understand what to expect. Then we have to judge that in terms of our willingness to pay higher taxes if we want higher performance. It becomes a very pervasive argument when you go to somebody and say: well, do you want your taxes to go up, or do you want your road cleared? Most of them will take a little snow on the road. So it gives us a basis to provide them with the information.

8:20

Also, in terms of the contracting-out part that you've done, I'd like to ask you the same question that I asked the Minister of Health this afternoon in question period: how do you justify the contracting-out when these private companies have to get the 15 to 20 percent return on their investment and the public sector takes that 15 percent, takes it out of one pocket and puts it back into the other? Where is the inefficiency that existed in the public service part of highway maintenance before that doesn't exist now such that the private operators were able to underbid what it was costing your department to do those services prior to the contracting-out? It seems that there's a 15 or 20 percent return on investment or profit there that the public service should have to operate on as a leeway. It's just a transfer of money into their pocket as opposed to shareholder profits. So you see the argument that comes up in terms of: why is it cheaper to contract out than to do it through a public service?

I guess the next issue that I want to talk a little bit about is goal 7, where you're talking about responses to major disasters and emergencies. This is quite notable, I think, in the last couple of years. There seems to be more floods, more droughts, more severe snowfalls. Are we in any way building it into the models, or is there data that will allow your models to project or expect the cost of these disasters? Are you identifying anything that could be associated with a greater variability in climate associated with global warming or any of those kinds of issues that we hear debated so much in the public in terms of the impact that this may have on our climate, the regional effect on the climate? Is that being looked at? Do you have enough data yet to be able to show that kind of an impact on your projections of the number of dollars that we might need for these disaster program support conditions?

The other issue that I want to talk a little bit about is goal 9, supporting safe and cost-effective utility services. Here one of the activities that you undertake is the support for municipal water partnerships in terms of the rural communities. I was wondering if the minister had done any possible planning or looking into the extension of these municipal water systems into some of the rural water lines that are being put in. There's a number of them being planned across the province that I'm aware of. People have contacted me asking me for information, asking me for contacts like: who else is doing this, and who do you know that we can get in contact with? They've been very concerned as they go out and start their planning. They may be able to go down and decide

where to put in their water line with the base station, the withdrawal station, put in a pipeline, and they're only getting, say, 30 to 50 percent of the farmers along the pipeline who are actually signing up at this time. If they're going to put in a properly sized water system pipeline, it doesn't leave room for expansion.

One of the things I think the minister might want to look at is the possibility of joining a partnership with them, much like you do with the municipalities, where you might, say, provide funding to put a 30 percent or a 40 percent overcapacity on it so that in the next few years as other farmers or other rural residents see the advantage of it, they can hook onto it and buy a share back from you. So if there were, say, a hundred farmers willing to go on along the route, there might be 150 possible hookups. You know, if the minister was to provide funding so that the capacity of the system could be built to 130 or 135, then as other farmers wanted to get on, you could sell them your share, one of those hookup shares, and get your money back. Really the only cost to the public through your department would be the carrying cost of that capital investment for the number of years between the time of the establishment of the water system and the eventual new hookup. In fact, you may even increase the cost a little bit to those people to recover that interest as a penalty for not signing up at the start.

This is something that a number of the rural water systems that are being looked at and planned are really interested in. They see their water line going past a bunch of these other farmers who say: right now we don't want to. But if that farm gets sold and a new rural residence gets established along the line and they want to come on, the line hasn't been established with that capacity. These farmers don't feel they should have to take that initiative to expand the system and then take the chance whether these people are going to come on or not and the timing that they'll come on.

I think that it would be something I'd encourage the minister to look at in terms of really being a supportive part of developing potable water. This is, you know, household water that rural homesteads, rural residents can actually use. It's really important, as we see. With the perceptual decrease in water quality in some of these rural areas, people are now questioning the advantage or the wisdom of using rural untreated water sources, because they don't know what the contaminants might be. There are all kinds of little stories that show up in newspapers and through community discussions: oh, did you hear about that? These kinds of things scare people about the safety of their water. These rural potable water systems are really, I think, a place where the minister could make a real contribution to the community that's out there in rural Alberta under a program very much like you use for the local municipalities, the local towns and villages.

I guess the only other issue I would like to speak to, Madam Chairman, is the issue of safety. I started the discussion talking about how I was really pleased to see the minister put that increased focus into reorganizing his department. The issue now is that we need to have a monitoring system in place to make sure we don't have the kind of situations in this that have arisen in the last little while, you know, with truck tires, with school buses. We need to have some kind of a monitoring system in place so that the people of Alberta feel comfortable that with this move to an information system function on behalf of the government and a self-regulatory or self-supervisory move outside your department, scrutiny of safety is working. People need to have the information that will allow them to feel confident about that. It might be advantageous to start a little campaign of information dissemination to the people of Alberta much like what you did here just recently talking about the new focus on safety and how

that gets out and people see that that emphasis is there. We need to have things like – maybe part of your class 1 or 2 driver's licence needs to be a take your tire off, check it out, and put it back on training course to make sure that somebody who gets one of those licences is competent to judge whether or not their tire is sound on their vehicle. Could that be built into the testing and the licensing process? Great. Okay. The minister says that it's done already.

8:30

MR. PASZKOWSKI: That's the new part.

DR. NICOL: That's the new part. All right. Great. You know, this is what's nice about these kinds of discussions. You can give an answer back like that, and I really appreciate it.

Madam Chairman, I think my time must be just pretty close, and I'll let the minister – if his throat is revived again, we'll have some more comments. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, and thank you for allowing me a bit of a break here. I'll try and respond to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East as best as I can and as quickly as I can and then allow someone else to participate here.

The question of twinning is always a challenge – I found that out very quickly – in that if you really, really want to set up a bit of a storm, decide that you want to twin a highway. There are as many that are in support of the twinning as there are opposed because they're directly affected of course, and it does directly affect people's lives. Some of these people have been along a highway for 70, 80 years, and all of a sudden it's very disruptive in that they have to move. We're still in discussions with the communities of Milk River and Warner in that part of the community wants the highway to go right through the town and the other part of the community says: no, it's quite disruptive if we have the highway going right through the town. It's our intention to meet with the residents and ultimately hear their views and together with the stakeholders make that final decision. Indeed, we are quite prepared to go and discuss the issues with the people. It's going to be quite a challenge as we move on through various communities, particularly with the agricultural community that's located along the highway. It's very disruptive when you suddenly wake up one morning and you've got a highway 10 feet from your bedroom window. Ultimately these people have a right to be heard, and it's our objective to see that they are properly heard.

The rural transportation initiative. Yes, that's something that's very important to us and something that we are in discussions on. As a matter of fact, as early as this morning we met with the AMD and C regarding some new thoughts and some new initiatives as to how to fund highway development throughout Alberta, and certainly that's going to be an issue that will have additional opportunity during the summit discussions, because it doesn't matter what it is that we develop as far as this province is concerned, we've got some very optimistic objectives. I know in agriculture we're planning on doubling our output by the year 2005. Certainly forestry, for example, energy, all of those have great capabilities to expand their opportunities to basically market products that we're not producing today. We're simply shoveling out of the province in a raw bulk form, and that was primarily my battle with the Wheat Board. We're sending far too much in the

raw form, and someone else is taking the opportunities away that we should be using right here: the employment opportunities, the increased value of the product. All of that could be done right here because we certainly have the educated workforce. We certainly have the intelligence. We certainly have the mechanical capabilities. We have the resources. There's absolutely no reason why we can't be doing more of that here, and as we work together, we're going to have to develop an additional infrastructure which includes water and sewer, which includes gas, which includes power. It includes all of the utilities that are so essential to make this work.

The northern highway trade route is going to be something that's going to have increasingly more importance. In the past our trade routes have been east/west, and it's changing. It's changing more to north/south, and that's where the markets are. That's where the growing markets are as well, and that's where most of our future exports are going to be destined to. So we have to design a process that will allow for the feeder lines to feed in, and by and large that's going to be some primary but also some secondary road network that will properly feed to our north/south trade corridor.

Further to that, though, there's also a study that was released by the federal transportation minister, David Anderson, just before the election call, on the northwest trade corridor. It had 78 points that really identified 78 problems to allow for a seamless transportation system that would move through to the northwest corridor. It's a good report in that it identifies all the problems. It's a lacking report in that it really doesn't provide any solutions. By and large, in the past most of us know what the problems are. It's now a matter of sitting down and coming forward with solutions.

If we could solve those 78 problems that were identified, we'd have it made. We would have a tremendous system that would become very . . . [interjection] Partly, yeah, partly; mostly probably. But there's also some co-operation, there are also some regulations that are inhibitors, and those really can be solved and have to be solved in order to make the system work. Ultimately, at the end of the day that's going to be one of our early thrusts. As a matter of fact, we're going to be in meetings with our neighbours to the west immediately to see if there's some way we can come forward with a resolve regarding some of the regulatory processes that we can't access. Our transportation system has difficulty in accessing to the west.

We'll also be in meetings with our neighbours to the south, because we've got one or two states that have different regulations and different rules and make it very difficult for the producer of the products in Alberta to be able to get his product to a customer on time through a system that's as seamless as possible. Ultimately at the end of the day that's got to become our focus, and our attention has to work in that particular area.

Our three-year plan should help the municipalities in planning as well. We think by designing our plan forward three years, it will certainly assist the municipalities in designing their plans, and they'll have some foresight as to what the objectives of the department are and where it'll be coming from.

The resources road. What's the formula for the resources road? It's a fairly complex formula, yet it's fairly simple, too, in that it involves a traffic count, which of course is a natural. In order to qualify for the resources road program, you have to have a minimum of 25 trucks a day on that particular highway. It depends on what the material is that's being carried. But a traffic count is always a key on every highway development that we develop in this province.

The maintenance expectations. What are the maintenance

expectations? They're the same as what we expected from the publicly delivered system. Indeed our expectations from the private enterprise are every bit as high as when the government was delivering that service. That's what our expectation is. That's what we expect out of our private contractors, and by and large they have been delivering. As a matter of fact, in our conversation I mentioned that I've actually had quite a few letters from people saying: "Why are you paying these people so much? They're obviously wasting money because they're out there sanding when there isn't even any snow on the highway." I've had several of those letters, actually. The people themselves are quite vigilant and quite tax conscious that indeed it is their money that's being spent on that sand that may be applied that isn't necessary. If there is a consistency where the snow is not being removed - you're correct in identifying that there is a priority for snow removal on highways, of course. But if there is a chronic problem, I very much would appreciate hearing, and we will deal with that, I assure you, in that area.

How do we justify contracting out when private enterprise has to have a profit margin? That's true. Private enterprise does operate on a profit margin. That's healthy and that's good. I'm sure you and I both agree that that's what we want to strive for. But competition also drives efficiencies. When we go to a private system, it's competitive. Consequently, at the end of the day it's the competitive process that comes together that determines what that price will be. Through this competitive process we also develop some pretty encouraging efficiencies. It creates entrepreneurial spirit that isn't normally there. What you do is you suddenly start thinking: how can I do the job in a more cost-effective and more efficient way? It's a great, great motivator to find ways of dealing with those particular issues so that you can find a more cost-effective way. Because we've set the standards and we've set the limits that have to be met. Ultimately at the end of the day the service, at least from our perspective and the general feeling in the community, is being delivered at a corresponding rate as to when we used to deliver that same service in government. Yet we are doing it for less money, and that's really the key. That's what it's all about.

8:40

Disaster services. We have no contingency for disasters. The very ability, the price of disasters - you just couldn't budget for it. It's all over the map. Some years there's nothing; other years, like the Edmonton tornado, \$45 million. You just can't possibly anticipate it.

As far as severe changes in weather, yes, there does appear to be a situation that's developing where we're in a mode of more volatile weather. If you talk to climatologists, they indicate the sunspot activity is greater. That seems to generate some problems. The volcanic activity has been greater, and as a result of the volcanic activity, there is more sulphur put into the air. The sulphur coats the ice particles that are in the air, the sun's rays don't come through, and consequently you have all kinds of changes in weather patterns. [Mr. Paszkowski's speaking time expired]

Thanks for the gentle hint.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. minister.

After considering the 1997-98 business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Transportation and Utilities, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
 Operating Expenditure \$542,611,000
 Capital Investment \$136,550,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Next we will be dealing with the designated supply subcommittees, and they will be reporting tonight to the Committee of Supply. We have Health, Justice, and Labour.

The process is as follows. The chairman of the subcommittee shall report to the Committee of Supply, and this report shall not exceed 20 minutes, after which time the person designated as the Official Opposition critic will also make a brief oral report not to exceed 20 minutes. If the third party New Democrats so choose, their critic can also make a brief report not to exceed two minutes.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I'm sorry. I neglected this. Could I table the responses that I wasn't able to deal with orally at the last session? I'd like to table the balance of those responses, if I may, please.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes. Thank you.

The Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

Justice and Attorney General

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's always a privilege to rise in the Assembly and report on something as important as the estimates for the Department of Justice and Attorney General. I will make my comments very brief. There are just a few things I wanted to cover.

We had tremendous co-operation from both sides of the House. I would like to congratulate and commend the members of the Justice committee. While we were doing the estimates, there was no wrangling, and we managed to get through an awful lot of work that morning. I would also like to commend the minister who, being brand-new to this portfolio, was able to handle – despite an incredibly bad ruling by the chairman of that committee saying that he couldn't have participation from his staff, he did manage to do it all very well by himself.

Madam Chairman, I guess my final comment would be to say that I hope that at some point we can review the Standing Orders of how we do the designated subcommittees so that we do have some uniformity and clarity and understanding of how the process really works.

Thank you very much.

MS OLSEN: Is it okay?

MR. HAVELOCK: Just perfect. Shoot.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, hon. minister. I just have, actually, a couple more questions. I, too, appreciated the expediency of our designated committee. Things went very quickly, and I appreciated the co-operation of the chair and the minister. I just have a few more questions, not many, and I want to throw them out. Either they can be answered now or in written form.

I'm not sure whether this question was asked. I know I didn't ask it, but I'm not sure whether it was asked by one of my

colleagues. It's in relation to gun control. Given that the province's own lawyers didn't recommend pursuing the Charter argument and 64 percent of Albertans agreed with the federal gun control legislation, I'm just wondering if the minister could provide us with a cost to date of the particular argument and court process and the anticipated future costs.

My next question is actually in relation to corrections. In relation to performance measures for corrections, I'm just wondering if the minister will be undertaking any longitudinal studies to determine whether the cuts to treatment and life skills programs within the institutions have contributed to the recidivism rates. How much funding is directed to specific programs for inmates? One program I'm concerned about is the sex offenders' treatment program, given that there seems to be a higher recidivism rate with sex offenders. How long is the waiting list for these offenders in the institutions to get treatment? Is it of a voluntary nature, and is there a requirement after release to continue with their specific programs?

My final comments are in relation to crime prevention. Twenty-five thousand dollars has been earmarked for crime prevention programs throughout this province. Unfortunately, the minister has alluded to the fact that, yes, we have a lower crime rate. However, crime prevention is proactive, and crime prevention saves money down the road. Crime prevention through environmental design, crime prevention through social design costs a little bit of money up front; however, in the long run far more dollars are saved because far more people are treated in a holistic, preventative program. They would be treated from an early intervention aspect, from a health aspect, from an education aspect. A lot of those folks would be involved in inner-city programs. The need for that to continue, the need for partnerships, the need for this government to recognize that crime prevention goes beyond Block Parents, Neighbourhood Watch, Stop Thief – those are all great programs, and in most instances those programs work. However, they're just one part of the picture, and we need to continue to fund other programs and get commitments. Twenty-five thousand dollars just doesn't buy an ounce of prevention these days. I would like to actually have – and I've asked for that – what that \$25,000 is specifically going to, if it's brochures, if it's programs, whether it's videos, those types of concerns.

There are bigger concerns such as family violence. The Edmonton Police Service operates a program in conjunction with social workers to deal with that. They don't have enough family violence teams to deal with the real issues. In the long run, those programs are what help keep people out of jail, help keep kids on the straight and narrow.

8:50

The Edmonton Police Service and, I know, other police services as well operate a children-at-risk response team, which is really a police officer, again, and a social worker that works alongside. That social worker comes from the province, is with Family and Social Services in the province. It's a tremendous program. It is also a prevention program. It is a crime prevention program in the bigger aspect of crime prevention, the broader aspect. Again, a need for a program, but a need for more funding to deal with these issues, to get kids out of homes that are not appropriate for them, where they're being abused in many instances, and then to go the step further and have the locations for those children placed so that they're in fact not going back into homes where they're further abused.

So I really would appreciate it if the government would start

looking at the whole prevention aspect in a bigger focus, maybe look at the national crime prevention council's mandate and adopt a similar mandate for this province. That in the long run will save the entire justice system a heck of a lot of money.

Those are all my questions for tonight.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I guess I'd start by saying that I still haven't received a written response to the questions that had been asked in the committee. There were a lot of excellent questions posed from all members, and I just think it's a whole lot more helpful when we're in a position of having to vote on estimates if we've seen the responses asked in good faith of ministers.

I'd also like to make the observation that I've had the chance to be on a few designated subcommittees, and in the five years I've been here, Madam Chairman, that was probably the most productive of any of the subcommittees I've been involved with in examining the budget process. It's a credit to both the chairman, who's not here now, but also the Minister of Justice. The chairman may not be listening to me as I speak now, but certainly the Minister of Justice is here, and I want to tell him that I just found it – and I expect other members did as well – to be an extremely productive session. The minister was actually prepared to respond to many of the questions directly and frankly. Although we still have some outstanding questions, I think the minister deserves credit, and the chairperson of the committee deserves credit for moving us to that point.

My question to the Minister of Justice. As we're now at the last opportunity to deal with the budget for this department, I'd like to know from the minister what happened to all of that passion that we heard in this Assembly, talking about alternative dispute resolution. The other day on a private member's Bill we heard member after member after member talk about the importance of mediation, arbitration, in some cases to save costs, in other cases to allow people to be an author or at least a co-author of solutions to particular problems they found themselves in. What we found was that people would talk about some of the ADR initiatives in the province, but for the most part, those are all being undertaken and operating independent of the Ministry of Justice.

My question to the minister would be: what's happening in terms of taking all of that sentiment in this House, because clearly there's a lot of momentum, at least, as best one could tell from listening to the comments on that debate on the Crown contracts Bill – what kinds of concrete steps would the Minister of Justice take to take advantage, if you will, exploit that interest in the Assembly in promoting arbitration and mediation? Will the minister commit to creating a pilot project, for example, in the city of Calgary or Edmonton, the multidoor courthouse concept? What steps will the minister take to reduce the current waiting list that exists for low-income Albertans who want to be able to access mediation services to resolve custody access disputes, matrimonial disputes? What steps is this minister prepared to take to create a unified family court in the province of Alberta? This becomes a sort of stock question I get to trot out every budget estimate. It saves me a whole lot of work in researching maybe new issues, but I'd be much happier to have this taken away from me. I'd be much happier to have the minister scoop what I think is a pretty sensible idea, and I offer it to this minister as I offered it to his predecessor and the person before that.

I think we still have far too many Albertans in this province

who are effectively denied access to the very court system they pay for. It's just not acceptable. I give credit to the minister that he's told us he's going to increase the threshold to go to Provincial Court, small claims division, from \$4,000 to \$7,000 or \$7,500. It doesn't go far enough. We've got to get it to \$10,000. He was candid with us in the committee and told us why we can't go there in one move, and I'm heartened by the fact that we're making some progress, but there are other things that we can do.

The other thing I'd like to speak to is the whole area of public legal education. If you believe, as I do, that people are empowered if we give them more information, there would be not such a huge reliance on lawyers and those kinds of things if there was more support for public legal education in this province. It's just so important. A lot of the people I represent – the largest number of new immigrants of any constituency in Alberta live in Calgary-Buffalo the last time I looked at the numbers. A lot of these people don't have much in the way of resources. For most of these people the main communication tool – they don't read newspapers. Many of them don't, anyway, in terms of English-language newspapers. The main medium for many of these people is television.

There have been some creative ideas that have come through PLENA, the Public Legal Education Network Association of Alberta, in terms of trying to provide people with more information on their rights and their remedies, but there's been no government support for that. Indeed, other than the Alberta Law Foundation, which was created by a statute of the province, we tend to give a sort of grudging acknowledgment officially to public legal education, and really that goes hand in glove with all of this talk about a multidoor courthouse, about alternative dispute resolution.

Public legal education is sort of one of the orphaned issues in the Department of Justice, and I'm hopeful the Minister of Justice will take advantage of the opportunity he's got now to embrace the challenge to be a leader in this country in terms of giving people public legal education, facilitating it. The provincial government doesn't have to provide all the services, but you can provide leadership. You can bring groups together. You can challenge them to come up with programs. You can challenge them to come up with ways to make these things self-financing or mostly self-financing. So I'm hopeful yet that we will see some of those initiatives.

I'm concerned that still we have youth court judges in Calgary having to walk through youth court among the very people they're sentencing or have just sentenced because we've never been able to get around to make the improvements in the youth and family court in Calgary. I hope that we don't have a crisis or an incident. Madam Chairman, sometimes people think it's dangerous being an MLA, and my reaction is: it's nothing compared to being a divorce lawyer, because I got far more death threats doing that line of work than I ever did being an MLA. Hopefully that pattern doesn't change. But one of the things I found is that that's a very real concern for those family and youth court judges. Many times it's been raised. I understand there's some money in Public Works, Supply and Services. They're looking at trying to do something with it, but I think it's the Minister of Justice who is going to have to champion that and move it along, Madam Chairman.

I'd just conclude by saying again that I'm heartened. We saw some real candour from the Minister of Justice when he appeared in front of the committee. He undertook to do some things that were very encouraging. I'm still anxious to see the written

responses. This whole system of voting on estimates becomes a bit shallow if we don't have the written responses beforehand.

Those are the comments I wanted to make. There may be others who wish to take what's left of the time.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

9:00

MRS. SLOAN: I would like to make some comments, Madam Chairman, but I think probably the main point I would like to make is procedurally. This is the very first time that I have seen a minister not attend to the debate or the questions being raised by the opposition. I would like to draw that attention to the hon. minister. I think it's an opportunity that we all take seriously. It concludes our questions with respect to the areas.

Chairman's Ruling Subcommittee Reporting Process

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member, but the agreement as spelled out by the House leader and your Opposition House Leader precludes him from doing that. We're reporting the designated subcommittee of supply tonight, and of course this comes vis-à-vis the chairmen, those that were chairing the meeting.

MRS. SLOAN: Well, my point, Madam Chairman, was that the minister is here, but he is the only minister I have seen that has not paid attention or at least responded to the questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. I don't think that's necessary.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. That's the only issue I wanted to raise.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think, hon. member, that definitely was uncalled for. Part of the process, of course, is the four hours that are spent in the subcommittee stage, where it certainly is spelled out in an agreement. The minister at that point in time is very receptive and does answer a lot of the questions. I don't think that was necessary.

MRS. SLOAN: Madam Chairman, I'm quite prepared to take your ruling on that. But as a new member I've watched this type of procedure happen before, and it was my observation that this is the first time it has happened in this way. It's my observation, nothing more than that.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, that is strictly your opinion. I would say that the subcommittee stage certainly allows a great deal of dialogue and debate between members of the subcommittee and the hon. minister, and a number of your colleagues have said what an exceptional job he did. So I would ask you to withdraw that.

MS LEIBOVICI: If I may, I'd like to know under what point of order that is.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It's the ministry's estimates that we have under consideration tonight. That's the budgetary amounts and the operating expense. The debate on this particular ministry basically has taken place during the subcommittee stage. We are asking the chairs of the various subcommittees that are reporting tonight to report, and that is the chair's responsibility.

Debate Continued

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$337,362,00
Capital Investment	\$1,780,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the estimates be reported when the committee rises and reports?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Labour

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call on the Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It is a pleasure to be here in a supporting role and introduce the subcommittee of supply for the estimates for the Department of Labour, which represents one third of 1 percent of the budget of the province of Alberta. I shall do so and undertake as well to have response from the debate that occurred in the four hours last Monday.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Madam Chairman, it was a pleasure and an educational process for me to sit on Monday morning with the hon. minister and one of his deputies. I have a few more questions.

[Mr. Shariff in the Chair]

It was with interest – and we discussed this earlier, the minister and our committee. I look down the benches of the Executive Council, and the minister with such a modest budget and his assistant deputy ministers – you can look at the ministers of transportation, community development, the minister of agriculture, who is absent, and they have much larger budgets, but they seem to have less administrative staff.

MR. HAVELOCK: A point of order.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Point of order, Minister of Justice.

Point of Order Referring to the Absence of Members

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Chairman, just briefly, there's another reference to a member not being present in the House, yet that member is present. Could you please explain to all members that you are not to refer to whether or not someone is present in the House.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar,

it's common practice not to make reference to other members' presence or absence in the House.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. The minister of agriculture, I'm sorry I missed. I'm sorry.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Now, the full-time equivalents in this department. The budget for the assistant deputy minister, issues and regional management office, was increased by over 27 percent. The budget for the assistant deputy minister, professional and technical services office, was increased by 45 percent. According to the 1995-96 public accounts every senior official or executive in this department received a raise. All this at a time when public-sector employees, health care workers, and teachers were forced to accept a 5 percent cut to their pay. Now, we talk about pay cuts. I understand there was a 1.5 percent pay increase for some government employees today, but I would like to relate this story that I heard when I was at the hearing for the Quality of Life Commission.

There once was a farmer who owned a mule who could plow 40 acres a day on a bale of hay. One day the farmer decided to cut the bale in half and see what the mule could do. It plowed another 40 acres the very next day. So the farmer cut the bale in half again. The mule did another 40 acres. He was so excited by this that he decided to do the 40 acres with no hay. The mule died. How can we expect people to work on nothing?

Alberta's minimum wage is not enough for families or even single people to support themselves on. It also acts as an economic barrier to people trying to enter or re-enter the workforce. If social support payments provide more than the minimum wage, causing people to turn down work, the problem is not that support payments are too high but that wages, Mr. Chairman, are too low. The costs of raising the minimum wage are outpaced by the social and economic benefits of providing a wage to people that allows them financial security. A one-time increase is not enough, for it will quickly fall behind the cost of living. Therefore, the minimum wage should be raised at regular intervals to meet the economic realities of living in Alberta.

Now, Mr. Chairman, some of my colleagues have some questions as well in the time allotted. I would ask the member for Edmonton-Riverview if she has any questions.

Thank you.

9:10

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have some questions. I didn't have an opportunity to be in the committee with respect to this budget and business plan, so I have some questions to raise for the first time with respect to a number of aspects contained within the report.

First of all, within the mission of the Department of Labour I found it of interest that the ministry cites "promotion of Alberta as a good workplace for business and labour" and "promotion of appropriate workplace, safety and professional standards." I would perceive that in the context that this government is promoting unionization. I do not, however, see that transcending into other measurements or allocations within the budget.

The reason I say that is a historical one. I think if anyone has studied the progress of economic growth not only within Canada

but within the continent, unionization has always accompanied significant periods of economic growth. I would use the industrial revolution as an example of that. It would not seem, though, that this ministry is making it any easier for labour organizations, for unions, to conduct their business, to represent the interest of members in this province. So to me the mission to some degree is in conflict with the practice in the field.

I would also just like to critique – the first major strategy points out that there is an option, the third option, for restructuring government. That is to reduce

resource requirements by developing partnerships outside of government; maintaining current levels of service and standards; and [at the same time] creating employment opportunities.

I find the statement about developing partnerships of interest because again I do not see, transcended in the business plan or allocations, mechanisms that promote the partnership with labour, with unions. I do see continual references to the marketplace and to business, but the references with respect to the labour organizations, whether it be in this province or across the continent, are not there. So again I see a degree of conflict between those.

In terms of the highlights for '97-98, again in the way of a critique I wanted to ask a question with respect to the re-examination of the role and resourcing level of professions and occupations. Again through my analysis I did not see any elaboration about what that entailed. One related question is whether or not that is what the minister – the delegated administrative organizations which are not defined but are identified in the performance measures: is this what is intended for professions and occupations? I think it would be extremely helpful, given some of the terminology that is utilized that is not familiar to me. Even as someone who spent all of my professional career in the public sector, for most of that time as a member of a trade union, I have no idea what those terms mean.

The key performance measures used by the Department of Labour I would have to say are to some degree subjective and superficial in my mind. The one that came to mind was: how many collective agreements have been negotiated successfully between two parties in this province in the last year with no interference by government, no mediation, no arbitration, just two parties sitting down and concluding a collective agreement? That to me is the number one factor or measure of your success as a ministry, the fostering of effective and collaborative partnerships at the business and labour level. That is not in your performance measures, so we have no way of knowing. In addition to that, how many collective agreements had to be mediated? How many had to be arbitrated? Again, no reference within the ministry, no performance measures that give any relationship. I think it's an opportunity for the minister. I think there are successes in those areas. I think there is tremendous work attempting to be done to foster a more cordial relationship between business and labour, between employers and employees, but your business measures do not reflect that.

The degree of client satisfaction. How was this determined? I note that the '95-96 figures only for that specific measure are not available, and I wonder why that is. I don't know if the minister can provide any elaboration.

I also found it of interest in the performance measures that this ministry only targets to measure or to act on 61 percent of the repeat offenders against employment standards. If you wax so eloquent that you want to foster an environment where there is – and I quote from your mission – a "promotion of Alberta as a good workplace for business and labour," why is your measure not 100 percent? Why should employers, to use again your own

terminology, have the unfair advantage of repetitively misusing employment standards to gain some edge, whether it's economic or in relationship to their employees?

I did have the opportunity to read the committee discussions with respect to this area of the budget. One of the things that I found of interest with respect to the administrative allocations is that issues management was not identified as an area that had a deputy minister. I understood that it did have, but it's not identified by the minister in the references in this committee. So there's a question there for me in terms of who's at the helm of the issues management ship.

Also, a question with respect to the references made in committee to the expansion and rollout of the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation, and this, as the minister says, includes municipalities, school boards, and RHAs. The minister implied in his references that it would occur within this fiscal year and that the increases within the budget were to facilitate the application of freedom of information and protection of privacy to the MUSH sector. I guess I wonder: how is that going to happen? The rumours certainly are that the government isn't planning on having a fall session. At least those are the things that I've heard. So if the minister is incorporating increases in his budget to make freedom of information apply, how does he propose to do that unless perhaps it's in this session or in the early part of next year? Just a question and clarification with respect to that.

The suggestion as well contained within the Committee of Supply, privatization of employment standards and operating that or administering that through a series of registry-like facilities – I find that to be a novel concept. I'm not sure if the minister can provide to the members gathered here: for what rational reason we would want to do that? If the government sets it, why would you contract it out? If the government is responsible for maintaining an economic balance between business and labour, why would you leave that to the hands of a third party? Again, with all due respect, it doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

9:20

I did also find a quote of interest in the committee, and I think it magnified for me the difficulty, I guess, that I've sometimes had understanding the philosophy of government with respect to labour. The quote was made by the minister. It reflected that there had to be a degree of

fairness and equity in the marketplace. But the marketplace is the driver; it continues to prove to me conclusively that the invisible hand of the marketplace is the most effective way to allocate scarce resources on a competitive basis.

That statement and, I guess, the power with which the minister believes the marketplace dictates our economy, our quality of life, our socioeconomic status – in my experience it hasn't been the case. I would say with all due respect that for most employees in the public sector, probably for most degree for a number of Albertans that has not been the case; the marketplace has not been the fairest indicator of equity.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

I'm sure that at some point the minister will elaborate further on how he proposes to achieve the mission of having Alberta be a good workplace for business and labour without fostering an environment in which unions can conduct their business, can advocate the interests of employees and improve the socioeconomic status of Albertans.

Those are my comments, Madam Chairman. Thank you very much.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Chairman. I'll just make a couple of points in terms of freedom of information. As I've raised with the minister outside the House before, on October 1, 1997, the section 5 paramountcy provision in the freedom of information Act kicks in. That means that any statute which is in conflict in terms of information will be subordinated to the freedom of information Act. Now, that has to take effect by October 1. We've got one freedom of information amendment Act, Bill 1, already in front of us, and as the spring session starts making its inexorable way to the finish, we still haven't seen legislation dealing with that.

So the specific question would be to the hon. Labour minister, who I see is very much engaged in this discussion as we speak: when are we going to hear the plan, Mr. Minister? Through the Chair: when are we going to hear the plan to deal with section 5 in the FOIP Act? When are we going to see which statutes are going to be specifically excepted from the provision of that? Now, I've asked the minister this, and I know he's been carefully studying it, but I don't have a response.

The other point would be that we're one year away from the European Union coming into effect, taking force, and I think it's article 25 that says that the EU nations, western Europe, are no longer going to be trading with countries that do not have adequate legislated protection for privacy or private data. I've been asking ministers about this now for about a year and a half, and I've never gotten a single response in terms of what the government of Alberta's plan is to deal with this.

We trade, it seems to me, something in the order of \$700 million of exports in terms of goods and services to western Europe. Why would we put that at risk? Right now the province of Quebec is the only jurisdiction in all of North America that's compliant in terms of the European Union directive. The Americans are scrambling to address this. Allan Rock, the federal government have been looking at it, but it's primarily a provincial responsibility. I want to know what the government of Alberta is doing so we don't jeopardize all of those export dollars to western Europe. There are some other pretty good and compelling reasons why we need protection of privacy in this province, but here's one that should appeal to the most mercenary member. Here's one that should appeal to every MLA/accountant.

I just raise those concerns. I'm still looking for responses, Madam Chairman. Thanks very much.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I wasn't sure if I'd have the opportunity to speak to this very important department. It's obvious that there's a lot of interest from members on this side of the House to continue the issue of labour within this province.

I have some specific questions, and they start on page 215 of the Post-Election Update, where the minister insists, it seems, on talking about and contemplating privatization in some areas that have formerly been addressed and, I thought, dismissed. In particular, one of the areas being looked at again is the employment standards branch and the privatization of employment

standards. Given the minister's experience upon first attaining the portfolio of Labour, where I believe his feet were held to the fire with regard to the privatization of employment standards, it's quite amazing, indeed I think I'm stunned to see that it is here once again, that privatization is being looked at. Given the possible implications with NAFTA and the sure to be legal challenge that will occur if it is looked at, I would like to know why that is here again.

Unfortunately, due to the expiration of time I am unable to ask some of the other questions that I had with regard to safety standards, safety codes . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the time has expired.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Strathcona, do you wish to utilize your time?

DR. PANNU: No, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Labour, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expenditure	\$32,967,000
Capital Investment	\$383,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the estimates be reported when the committee rises and reports?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Health

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The designated subcommittee met on Monday, May 5. Twelve members were in attendance. I'd like to compliment the minister. He listened intently and responded to some questions and gave his commitment to written answers. The meeting started at 8:04 a.m. and adjourned at 12:04 p.m. as allocated by Standing Order 56(7)(b). Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I seem to spend more time jumping up and down from my chair, but I'm going to remain standing now long enough to make a couple of observations.

I want to acknowledge that just a few moments ago, I guess about the time the Justice estimates started, the Minister of Health provided me with what appears to be a 16-page document, which appears to contain responses, although I haven't had a chance to

read it, to many of the questions asked in the committee.

You know, Madam Chairman, this is always this sort of weird position. On the one hand I thank the minister for having responses now. I remember one time being critic of a department where I asked a bunch of questions, and I got every response I asked for, but I got it two and a half months after the House broke for the summer. It's nice to have the information any time, but it's a heck of a lot more useful to have the information in hand when we can do something about it and hopefully make an informed vote.

So thanks to the minister for taking the time to prepare written responses to the questions I and some of my colleagues posed. Can we strive next year to get the responses at least a couple of days before the vote? You know, I'd make a bargain with the hon. minister. I'll even abridge my speaking time when we get to this stage if I get the written responses earlier. We can cut the time down a little further.

A couple of points in terms of estimates. We're dealing with a budget of \$3.95 billion dollars. This is an enormous portion of the provincial government budget. It strikes me as I look at the question and answer exchange with the hon. minister – and I don't really intend on pursuing that tonight. I think my difference with the minister is less on the detail than on the broad philosophical direction and perhaps a difference in values. I'm not sure that we're going to reconcile the minister's view and the government's view of health care and private health care, and in my view: one of the great assets in this country is a strong, public health care system that's universally accessible, that's publicly administered. You know, Madam Chairman, we're not going to bridge that difference in the short time we have tonight, but when I see the wait list that exists around the province and I look at the massive deskilling that's been undertaken throughout health care, you have to ask yourself whether we're truly further ahead, better off now than we were before.

9:30

There are so many issues surrounding health care. Physician fees, 2.1.1 element: this is something we've talked about I think in this House and in the designated committee, and for those Albertans who are still looking for the \$100 million in savings, we're still looking.

There's still a concern about rapidly increasing drug prices, the fastest growing cost in our health care system, and I'm not sure that the government of Alberta in its representations to the federal government is furthering or working at cross purposes with some of the excellent initiatives already underway in the Department of Health.

There's ongoing concern in terms of mental health services, and we've talked in the House about some of the concerns there. Access, particularly in southern Alberta, where there's much less reliance on Ponoka and Alberta Hospital, more people being treated within the Calgary regional health authority in particular and in southern Alberta in the big city hospitals, and of course, that's coming out of the CRHA budget. So it's an additional factor.

The delays and the waits in home care continue to be a major concern, and we're simply not doing well enough.

The 42 percent of rural physicians who were polled last fall and indicated that their inclination was to retire or leave rural practice.

The increase of about 2 to 4 percent for regional health authorities, leaving aside the additional moneys for specialized designated purposes: a real question in terms of whether that's realistic in terms of meeting the rather substantial need in terms

of more registered nurses, more health care workers. There are labour agreements coming up for renegotiation. That little increment, that little bump, many people far more knowledgeable than this layperson suggest that it isn't going to be enough, Madam Chairman.

All of the uncertainties surrounding mental health divestment continue to be a problem.

The health information consultation: concerns that the consultation with Albertans hasn't been broad enough. I had a fascinating time talking to a fellow involved with biometric encryption, and the province of Ontario is very interested in that as a means of maintaining control of our health records.

Madam Chairman, I'm reminded of the Premier who used to talk so much over the last four years about, you know, his analogy about the home renovation project. He always used to talk about this is a house under renovation. I sort of adapted that in my own mind in a way that seemed to more closely fit the circumstances, and it's sort of like me or any other Albertan wanting their kitchen renovated. You go and you hire a contractor who seems to be a genial type. He undertakes to do it, and you leave the house for awhile while the kitchen renovation is going on. What happens is you see an enormous amount of dust coming from the house, and you hear just a real din, a huge racket, in terms of the house construction. You start getting a little apprehensive, and you go up and you start trying to peek in the windows to see what's happening in the house. You can hardly believe it for the dust on the windows, but it looks like they've knocked down every wall in the house, even the load-bearing walls. You start looking a little further, and there's not been much done to the kitchen, but the rest of the house isn't recognizable. To compound things, the contractor you hired, that genial fellow from southern Alberta, is never around. He subcontracted virtually all the work to HRG Demolition for Dollars. So it's some other company out there that's doing the demolition work, and you're not real confident. That isn't the group you hired.

In any event, it looks like the contractor's contract term was renewed on March 11, and I can only think that Albertans at some point are not going to have to just peek through the windows. They're going to be able to go through the front door of the house, and boy, are they going to be in for a shock, Madam Chairperson. In any event, enough of that.

I wanted to find some way to express a concern that I had with the lack of planning going on in the province. I wanted to find some way of trying to protest the fact, as the Premier himself admitted shortly before the election, that he didn't have a plan. We may quibble over what he said and what he meant, but what was clear was that we embarked on this enormous home renovation project without ever having a blueprint. So my concern is that there has to be some way, Madam Chairman, of registering that concern.

I looked through the budget for the Department of Health, and the curious thing I found was that at line 1.0.16 we have the standing policy committee on health planning. It may only be \$85,000, but symbolically it seems to me that this is the entity that should have been there. It's sort of like our contractor in my little analogy. The contractor, we discover, has been doing all of this demolition, and when you ask him for his plan, he pulls out a matchbook cover. You see he's made a few notes on that, and on the basis of that he's knocked out the walls in your house. When you start complaining and you get a little agitated, then he brings in the engineer and the architect and we start wanting to do

the blueprint. It's too late, Mr. Minister. It's simply too late.

What I wanted to do was find some way of addressing this in the budget. This is 1.0.16, the standing policy committee on health planning, \$85,000. There's no opposition representation on this. This is basically yet another committee of the Department of Health. It just seems to me that this is an area of the budget that I can focus on that does not affect Albertan's health. It draws attention to the fact that we've never had a proper plan in this province. Yet one more committee, looking at the standing policy committee on health planning, simply isn't going to meet the needs.

With that, Madam Chairman, I think the amendment that I've had initialed by Parliamentary Counsel has been distributed. The amendment is simply . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can we just wait one minute, hon. member, while the Assembly is given the amendment.

MR. DICKSON: Certainly, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Possibly we can just hand those amendments out to the members that are present rather than to every desk.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. Actually, I was sort of enjoying the tranquility in this room. It's so rare that there's so little noise here. I'm not going to speak a whole lot louder. It was nice to have a quiet Chamber even for a few minutes.

9:40

In any event, what I'd like to do is this. Because the budget is set in units of a thousand dollars – I'd like to reduce the spending in the standing policy committee to a single dollar, but I'm not able to do that. So my intention is to reduce it to \$1,000 from \$85,000. To me what this is is a way of trying to communicate within the Standing Orders and the rules of this Assembly a protest on behalf of my caucus and the 18 MLAs who are part of my caucus that you can't take something as important as health care, turn it upside down and shake it until key elements start falling out and then, when all of that's done, start talking about trying to plan. The plan has to be in place first.

For all of those reasons, Madam Chairman, I move the amendment that's currently set out to reduce the funding in 1.0.16 by \$84,000, the operating expense to be voted at \$3,957,000 . . . Sorry; \$3,957,518,000. This is more numerals than I'm used to dealing with in my own bankbook.

Thanks very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No one else?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has moved an amendment

that the estimates for the standing policy committee on health planning under reference 1.0.16 in the 1997-98 estimates of the Department of Health be reduced by \$84,000 so that the operating expense to be voted on is \$3,957,518,000.

All those in favour of the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Those opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:44 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

For the motion:

Dickson	MacDonald	Pannu
Gibbons	Nicol	Sloan
Leibovici	Olsen	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Amery	Fritz	McClellan
Boutilier	Haley	McFarland
Broda	Hancock	O'Neill
Cao	Havelock	Paszkowski
Cardinal	Hlady	Renner
Coutts	Jacques	Shariff
Day	Johnson	Stelmach
Doerksen	Jonson	Stevens
Dunford	Laing	Strang
Evans	Langevin	Thurber
Fischer	Marz	Yankowsky
Friedel		

Totals:	For - 9	Against - 34
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[Motion on amendment lost]

MRS. SLOAN: I've had the opportunity actually to quickly just critique the minister's statements that he provided just a few minutes ago. I do want to take the opportunity, though, to commend the minister for providing some written feedback and doing so before the motion to approve the budget was made. I believe he's the only minister in the committees that I've been associated with who has done that, and I think that's a commendable step.

A couple of questions, though, with respect to that. [interjection] No. I did specify only the committees that I was involved in, that the Minister of Health was the first to have provided written feedback.

The minister spoke at some length with respect to the agreement with the Alberta Medical Association and related that in fact in the agreement - there was an original agreement - rather than to identify \$100 million in savings, to redeploy those savings. In my previous analysis of that original agreement, I did not understand that to be the case, nor did I recall that it was publicized in that manner. So if a change in direction was made, I was wondering if the minister would share with the Assembly when in fact the decision was made to redeploy those savings.

The other aspect that I wanted to just ask a question on. The minister said that the department does not use the number of beds as a standard in the province, that it's not a helpful measure. I found that interesting, and I wondered why that had changed. Originally, when the restructuring started, bed measurement was a standard. In fact, I believe we wanted to go to 2.1 beds per thousand or 2.2 beds per thousand. In fact, now we're below that; we're at 1.8 beds per thousand. It seems that again the ministry has changed their benchmarks. They're saying now that

the number of beds in the province is not a standard of measurement, that it's not a helpful measurement. I think particularly for the rural constituencies in the province, the number of beds is obviously a concern, and the constituents have concerns surrounding accessing them, just as constituents in the cities have expressed over the last three years. When did that standard of measurement change? That's my question with respect to that.

There is a statement, as well, that regional health authorities in this province must at a minimum provide emergency and primary level acute care services. In light of the increasing incidence of long waiting lists, surgery being postponed and in fact canceled, what is the ministry's mechanism for action when that is not occurring, when that minimum standard is not met? It has certainly been well documented both within the region 10 critical assessment committee medical staff report as well as the Provincial Health Council's report that access is perhaps the number one problem in the province. If that's a minimum benchmark, it's not being met, based on the government's own reports. What is the ministry doing to address that in the long term?

10:00

I also wanted to just share something that perhaps became clear to me not in the discussion with respect to the Health budget but in the discussion of the Labour budget and business plan. The proposition there is that there will be a melding of professions and technical staff, and it finally became clear to me what in fact the Health disciplines legislation is really intended to be all about. I did not see to any degree in the minister's budget - and I don't recall that we discussed this - any funding for the implementation of the health disciplines legislation and specifically the health disciplines advisory committee, which was held out as one of the key elements, one of the key platforms of that legislation. There's no funding in the budget, so I'm taking that to mean it's not going to be implemented in this fiscal year. That's fine with me actually, because quite frankly I'm opposed to the melding of professions and technical staff. I think a directive in that respect reflects a lack of understanding in terms of what comprises a profession, particularly in the health disciplines. It reflects a lack of understanding and respect as well for the degree to which people commit themselves, study hard, work hard to be accomplished in the profession of their choice.

There has been much debate and many questions around a related item of business with respect to this, and that is the proposed amendments to the licensed practical nurse regulations, all of which are occurring out of sync with the health disciplines legislation. It is still curious to me that that is happening, that in fact that discipline is being given preferential treatment by the ministry. They are not put on the same time line with the same expectations as all of the other 30 disciplines that are being impacted by the health disciplines legislation proposal.

I would encourage the minister, as he proceeds to undertake this melding of professions and technicians, to study the experiences in the United States, where in fact there are very recent statistical studies that have been published and are accessible to him which have linked the relationship of professional staff with declining morbidity rates and decreased lengths of stay.

So with that I would conclude, Madam Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to further address this budget.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Chairman. My comments will

be quite general this evening. My colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands and myself have been overwhelmed by the task that we have been faced with over the last three weeks. The session came quite close on the heels of the election, so the work has been enormous and our contribution has been somewhat limited because of the circumstances. But I want to make some general comments.

I promise to the House and to Albertans in general that we will certainly make our position on these issues very clear in the sessions to come. These are vital issues for Albertans, and we certainly hope to be able to speak to these issues, clearly indicating where we take a different position from the government and from other colleagues in the opposition.

Some general comments. When I was speaking yesterday on the motion by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on the medicare protection legislation, I drew attention to the concerns that Albertans have about the growing possibility of Americanization of the health care system in Alberta. Albertans are extremely concerned about that prospect, the prospect of seeing a two-tiered health care system develop. They certainly have expressed their concerns about the declining quality of health care and the worsening conditions of work inside hospitals across the province.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, hon. member, but your time has expired.

DR. PANNU: Have I finished five minutes? [interjection] Two?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes. Two minutes is up, Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Madam Chairman, thank you.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expenditure	\$3,957,602,000
Capital Investment	\$5,138,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported when the committee rises?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Chairman's Ruling Explanation of Chairman's Ruling

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before the Government House Leader makes the motion that the committee rise and report, the Chair would like to clarify an earlier exchange with the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

The Chair called the member to order for statements she made with respect to the Minister of Justice. The Chair was asked what the point of order was based upon. The Chair does not need to raise a point of order to intervene. If members refer to Standing Order 23, "a member will be called to order . . . if in the Speaker's opinion" the member violates certain rules.

In the Chair's opinion, the member violated 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member," and (h), "makes allegations against another member."

Debate Continued

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call on the Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Transportation and Utilities, the Department of Justice and Attorney General, the Department of Labour, and the Department of Health for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998, reports the approval of the following estimates, and requests leave to sit again.

Transportation and Utilities: \$542,611,000 for operating expense, \$136,550,000 for capital investment.

Justice and Attorney General: \$337,362,000 for operating expense, \$1,780,000 for capital investment.

Labour: \$32,967,000 for operating expense, \$383,000 for capital investment.

Health: \$3,957,602,000 for operating expense, \$5,138,000 for capital investment.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

10:10

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

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

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

Bill 3 Colleges Amendment Act, 1997

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to affirm a number of the comments made by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. I think he did an analysis at second reading which effectively highlighted some of the questions that we had on the Bill. I haven't been able to confirm with my colleague that he's received responses to any of the questions that

have been raised, but I think he did a good analysis, and I am quite happy to leave it at that.

Thanks very much.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the Bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

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

MR. DICKSON: Hello again, Madam Chairman. I've got an amendment I wanted to introduce at this stage, which I'd ask be distributed if it hasn't been already. Just while the amendment is being distributed, I might say that there is I think a lot of concern in this province about why it is that we have one set of rules when it comes to Albertans getting information from one of the provincial government departments or agencies and a different set of rules when it comes to local government, whether it be school board, regional health authority, municipal council.

We've heard actually a lot of discussion – and in fact I remember the Premier, both in the Speech from the Throne through the Lieutenant Governor and certainly in the House in introducing Bill 1, talking about applying freedom of information to the whole regime of local government. The reality is that there is not a single specific commitment in any piece of legislation in the province of Alberta that gives an outside date when freedom of information is going to apply to school boards, to regional health authorities, to municipalities. One can reasonably ask: why not? Why not?

You know, if we go back to – it was the spring of 1993. The Minister of Community Development will probably remember this better than I, but I think it was in the spring session of 1993 that the government introduced a Bill. I think it was Bill 61. The current Premier had just a few months before been elected leader of the Conservative Party, and he was leader of the Conservative caucus. He made it very clear to Albertans that he knew that after all of the mismanagement in the Getty years, after the \$2.3 billion, which it was then, in lost taxpayers' money, Albertans were angry. He very astutely identified that one way of differentiating his regime from the Getty years was to talk about making government more open. So he introduced Bill 61. But Bill 61 didn't have any provision at all to deal with local government, and he was justifiably criticized. The government was justifiably criticized.

After the election in 1993 I think the government was getting the message that Albertans wanted stronger legislation, and they looked at what was happening in British Columbia, where they could see that citizens in that province were able to get information about what was going on at the local government level. They insisted that the Bill be expanded, so Bill 61 was killed. It was reborn slightly as Bill 1 after the election, and then the Premier appointed his task force with three Liberal MLAs and a balance of government MLAs. We went around the province. We wrote the report. What the report provided was that freedom of

information should apply to all local government bodies. We talked in terms of wanting to do that quickly.

Now, what's interesting is: how long would provincial government departments have had to get ready for freedom of information? They first would have had notice when the Premier took office in – what was that? – December of 1992. It would have been first, then, in the spring of 1993. They knew it was coming. So provincial government departments really had, effectively, two years, because freedom of information was proclaimed, or at least took effect, on October 1, 1995. Between the summer of 1993 and October 1, 1995, the provincial government departments were ready for freedom of information.

You know, Madam Chairman, they've actually done a pretty good job in terms of having the systems in place. I'll salute, in fact, the work done by Ms Sue Kessler and the people in the information branch, because Alberta has done an outstanding job in terms of putting together training manuals, videos, and so on. Even if our freedom of information regime doesn't quite live up to the bold words of the Premier, who's on the front of the videotape which is part of their training package, we've done not a bad job in getting ready for it.

Now, my problem is: why is it that our provincial government departments could be ready in less than two years for freedom of information? We have municipal governments, we have universities and colleges, and we have some regional health authorities saying: whoa, don't pick on us; we're not ready yet. The reality, Madam Chairman, is that freedom of information is rarely embraced by any office or any department. Why? Because it creates some constraints for them. It builds in some logistical issues. It makes more work for a department. It imposes a kind of discipline. Freedom of information doesn't work if you can't go to a document, unless you first know what documents you've got and how you can access them. So what freedom of information does is it imposes a wonderful discipline on a government department or a public body. You have to start cataloguing the records you've got. You have to have systems to be able to manage documents from the time the file is created until the time it's destroyed.

I'd just go back and say that in this province, despite all of the talk members may have heard from the Premier or others about how freedom of information will apply to local government, it's not spelled out in legislation anywhere. This amendment would do that. July 1, 1998: it's more than a year from now. Some people may say: well, maybe municipalities and universities need more time. I want to say that I've been attending conferences for at least the last three years put on by the government of Alberta, and these conferences are about getting ready for freedom of information. The last conference had about 580 people in attendance, and we had every college and university represented, every municipality represented, at least all the major ones, and we had health authorities represented. These people know it's coming. They've been organizing, they have the material, and they're close to being ready.

10:20

You know, I went back and looked at some of the material Albertans told our panel in 1993. It was interesting. We had, for example, the Mount Royal College Students Association indicating they thought it was particularly important that freedom of information should apply. They think it's particularly important that it should apply to private colleges. In fact, they said at page 2 of their submission: why are private colleges not included in this Bill? Well, it may be argued that private vocational colleges are

privately held and should not be subject to government regulations; the other private colleges receive a large portion of their funding from direct government grants.

We had some other good input. I remember that the MD of Rocky View came in and made presentations about some of the issues they had around freedom of information, and this was back in November of 1993. We had the Association of Chiefs of Police making presentations to the all-party panel, and this was once again in the fall of 1993. They knew it was coming. They were getting ready.

We had John Anderson, I remember, speaking to us as solicitor for the city of Calgary. He has published a couple of articles on freedom of information, has some acknowledged expertise. He urged the panel and through the panel the provincial government to move earlier on freedom of information.

We had, Mr. Chairman, the current Minister of Municipal Affairs, who was then reeve of Strathcona county. We had a presentation where in fact the then reeve came, and she wrote on November 2, 1993, to the Select Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform. She talked then about some of the concerns that she had and Strathcona county had about freedom of information. This is November 2, 1993.

We can go through and look at other comments. On November 23, '93, I managed to finally get from the provincial government some of the information that they'd been receiving from universities and colleges. We wanted to know what they were thinking, responding. Many of them didn't write to the all-party panel. They sent submissions in directly to the respective ministers: Municipal Affairs, Justice, advanced education. So on November 23 I got a report from the Department of Justice, I think it was. They went through, and they talked – it looks like 12 pages of straight text – about responses from colleges and universities in the province with questions about freedom of information: how it's going to apply, how much it's going to cost, what things they have to do to get ready. I can go further and can identify another whole batch of submissions to the provincial government prior to November 1993 from school boards.

We had another whole parcel of recommendations from hospitals and boards of health. All of these groups have been aware of freedom of information since the fall of 1993. They've had the benefit of Sue Kessler's training material and videos and organizational manuals. They've had the experience of talking to their counterparts in British Columbia and Ontario, where local government there is subject to freedom of information. Why do we have to wait longer? Why wouldn't July 1, 1998, give adequate time, ample time, to all local government bodies to be ready and organized to go?

Now, some may say: there's no big rush because we don't have a problem at the local government level in accessing information. I guess my point to that, Madam Chairman, would be to tell you one of the things I remember most clearly from our freedom of information panel when we were going around the province. We were, I think, either in central Alberta or in northern Alberta, and we had somebody come forward, a mayor of a municipality, who said in sort of the proudest, most defiant terms imaginable: we don't have a problem with freedom of information in this area; my municipal council is open and accessible; if people have information, they can find out; we don't need an Act to be able to guarantee anybody a right to access information. Well, that was interesting, and she obviously was very genuine in believing that her community was open. The very next presenter was a woman

who lived in the same community who said: let me tell you the problems I've had trying to get information from this municipal council. She pulled out a file of letters. She had been requesting information on a particular municipal development that was important to her that had some environmental impact.

So I think that when we hear municipalities say "Freedom of information isn't necessary here; we're open already," the reality is that in almost none of those contexts – universities, regional health authorities, cities, municipal councils – do citizens have the five principles outlined in section 2 of the freedom of information Act: the right, not a privilege but a right, to access information subject to specific and limited exceptions; the right to find out information government has about them; the right to correct information that's wrong; the right to have an independent review if there's a disagreement with the government body. All compelling reasons.

Also, Madam Chairman, I want to point out that we had a number of specific presentations in terms of why local government should be included. We heard from the Alberta records management association. We heard from the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre. We heard from the Freedom of Information and Privacy Association. We heard from the Canadian Association of Journalists. We heard from the Alberta Human Rights and Civil Liberties Association and a whole number of individuals, more individuals than I'll take time to mention now. Each of these groups came forward and said: we want freedom of information; we want it at the local level. They wanted it to come in at the same time the provincial departments were covered.

For all of those reasons, Madam Chairman, I think it's important that we quit hedging, we quit fiddling around and misleading Albertans or teasing them by saying: freedom of information is coming to a government close to you. The reality is that without a deadline, without the discipline created or imposed by that, nothing is going to happen.

This government likes to talk a lot, Madam Chairman. This government likes to talk about putting people in a situation where they have to react. That's why the government said they had to press ahead with health reform and they didn't have time to consult with physicians and health care providers. Well, they may well have felt that was the case. To be consistent, why wouldn't they take the same position and say: "Freedom of information is sufficiently important that we're going to press ahead with it. We're going to impose a deadline that everybody knows is there and work towards. We can stage implementation between now and then, but absolutely by July 1, 1998, everybody will be covered." That's what we're asking for in this amendment.

You know, Madam Chairman, if the minister responsible, the Minister of Labour, were to come forward and say: "Okay, we'll give you a fixed date. It can't be July 1, 1998. We need another 60 days to organize for freedom of information at the local level," that would not be an unreasonable request. I suspect that my colleagues and I suspect that the members of the third party in the House might be disposed to try and work with the government to make an adjustment on that outside date. If July 1 is a little bit too early and they need another 60 days, I think we could work with the government to come up with a date. The key is that you need an outside deadline. We don't have that now. We have to press ahead with it.

10:30

Madam Chairman, when we think of the citizens, we think of the Provincial Treasurer, who always says: there's a single

taxpayer in Alberta. Well, there's also only one citizen of each level of government. It's the same citizen. I think that what's happening is that people are beginning to understand what enormous power regional health authorities have. I mean, in my city the Calgary regional health authority has a budget which is almost as big as that for the entire city of Calgary. It's about \$700 million. Isn't \$700 million, members, big enough? Isn't that enough money to warrant ensuring that there are some legislated constraints, requirements? Isn't that big enough that we should be concerned about how personal information and data is managed by that organization? I look at the city I am from. The city council has a budget of about three-quarters of a billion dollars. That's an awful lot of money. Many of the decisions made by local government are decisions that arguably in some respects have a bigger impact on many of the people in my community than anything we do in this building: policing, many of the key policing decisions; libraries. A lot of the social service kinds of decisions that are made in this province are made at the level of municipal government in Edmonton.

You know, I expect, Madam Chairman, that the people in Edmonton are concerned. In fact, I remember coming and meeting with representatives of the city of Edmonton, and they were one of the more supportive municipalities. That's one of the most co-operative municipalities, the city of Edmonton, in terms of understanding the importance of freedom of information. Now, that may be congruent with voting patterns and some wisdom quotient, but I won't carry that any further, being a Calgarian. Nonetheless, in Edmonton I was really impressed because people came out from that city and said: it's important to us that we know how our city council spends our money. Maybe the esteemed Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs as an Edmontonian and somebody who's been active in his community and has no doubt got a very large network of people involved in local government and perhaps the Capital health authority – I suspect that that member has got some good advice.

Thanks very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will refer to this amendment as A2.

All those in favour of the amendment . . . Oh, sorry.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that we adjourn debate with respect to Bill 1.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Those members in favour of the motion as moved by the hon. Government House Leader, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

Bill 2

Special Waste Management Corporation Act Repeal Act

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, you know, since the election we haven't been able to afford that massive photocopier we used to have. We just don't have enough copies of briefing notes to go around for everybody to come in with a set of notes to speak, but we're working on that. Hopefully, before the end of the session everybody's going to have their own set.

Just a couple of exceedingly brief comments I wanted to make on this Bill on special waste management. It strikes me that the

government is proceeding with some unseemly haste to eliminate every vestige of special waste management. I understand politically why that should happen, but I guess I'm enough of a pragmatist to say that because we have a number of contingent liabilities out there in that agreement negotiated by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for the province, it just would be more prudent surely to keep the shell alive until we've exhausted whatever sort of contingent liabilities we've got. Maybe the Minister of Justice and Attorney General can offer some sage advice in terms of how long that period should be. What's the point in trying to collapse the corporation as quickly as the government seems inclined to do? I think that's the principal concern.

Members before have been able to outline a host of other concerns with the Bill, but I think on the other hand that all Albertans want to celebrate as we get close to seeing the end of the Special Waste Management Corporation. I'm sure that we're all happy to close the book on this exceedingly unpleasant chapter in the history of Alberta. But there is still that concern about contingent liabilities, and it would make sense, Madam Chairman, that we would see the end of that before we proceed.

Those were the observations I wanted to make at this point, Madam Chairman. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that we adjourn debate with respect to Bill 2.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Those members in favour of the motion as moved by the hon. Government House Leader, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

MR. HAVELOCK: I made a mistake. Could we somehow have unanimous consent to bring that back and actually call the vote on it? No? Okay. I believe I was right.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I think you were right the first time.

MR. HAVELOCK: I was right. Okay. Thank you. Yeah.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

10:40

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 3. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 1 and Bill 2.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:41 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]