

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, May 22, 1997

1:30 p.m.

Date: 97/05/22

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Today's prayer comes by way of the pen of former Speaker Gerard Amerongen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

DR. NICOL: Yes. Thank you. It gives me great pleasure to present a petition on behalf of 112 residents of Lethbridge asking for VLTs to be removed from the community and the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Yes. It is my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to table the report of the committee recommending the reappointment of Mr. Robert C. Clark as the Ethics Commissioner and as the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a term of five years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice of the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendations of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices passed May 14, 1997, to recommend to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor that Mr. Robert C. Clark be reappointed as Ethics Commissioner and Information and Privacy Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a further five years effective April 1, 1997.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table one of 144 identical letters signed by 144 of my constituents regarding handicapped children's services funding. Copies of all letters have been distributed to the Premier and Minister of Family and Social Services as per their request.

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

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of a letter sent to me by Lawrence Noel. He has extreme concerns about the closure of campsites within Alberta.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature two school groups from the constituency of Drumheller-Chinook. First, I would like to introduce Consort school Generation X Club. This is a school club, and this trip is totally organized by the students under the leadership of Trevor Kulyk. The teacher Mr. Simpson, Mr. Kjearsgaard, and the parents have asked that the acknowledgement go to the students today. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the next school group that I have the honour of presenting to the House, of introducing to you and through you to our members, is from a school in Veteran, which is about 15 miles up the highway from Consort coincidentally. They are accompanied today by their teacher Mrs. Marilyn Johnson, who I would like to tell the Assembly was nominated for an excellence in teaching award, and the students are very proud of their teacher. They also have parents Mr. Long, Mr. Kary, Ms Whalen, and Mrs. Caseley with them. I would like to ask these fine students to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 120 bright grade 8 students from Olds junior high school. They are accompanied today by their teachers Garry Woodruff, George Grant, Lisa Dunlop, Pat Jeffery, Rhonda Varga, and 12 very brave adults that are chaperoning. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly Harvey Deutschendorf. Harvey is a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar and a noted author. He has recently published a book entitled *Of Work and Men*. The book was shortlisted by the Writers' Guild of Alberta for their best new book award. Locally the book is available at Greenwoods book store. Harvey, could you please stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Chris Brookes, who will be serving the residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan as the constituency assistant. If he would rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly, please.

head: **Oral Question Period
Health Resource Group Inc.**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the government's attempts to

justify HRG's hospital in Calgary and to allow more private American style health care just don't wash. Even the vice-president of King's health centre in Toronto is pointing out the differences between Calgary's private for-profit hospital and a day clinic in a business office tower operating within medicare. To the Minister of Health: now that he and the Premier have had a day to think about it, will he admit that there are in fact fundamental differences between the King's health centre in Toronto and the HRG private hospital in Calgary and that the Premier misinformed the House yesterday about those differences?

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, no, I certainly will not. As I think is appropriate in this particular type of matter, we've been taking a careful and methodical approach to gathering all the relevant information, and as I've indicated – and I'm sure it bears repeating given the question – we are certainly committed to adhering to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Now, I think very relevant to the question is that officials of my department met with representatives of HRG this morning. First of all, they certainly indicated their intent and desire to comply with the Canada Health Act. Secondly, they indicated that their focus or the objectives of their business plan were to serve third-party payers, to work out contracts with the WCB for rehabilitation services, and to offer service in terms of uninsured health care services. So, Mr. Speaker, that I think verifies the fact that this particular company's business plan is very, very much parallel to what I understand is the King's institution in Toronto.

1:40

MR. MITCHELL: Well, Mr. Speaker, if he persists in telling us that there are these great similarities between King's centre and the HRG private hospital in Calgary, could he at least explain why it is that the vice-president of King's health care centre in Toronto adamantly has stated publicly that there are no similarities between what the private hospital will do in Calgary and what a clinic operating within medicare is doing in Toronto?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would repeat something, and that is that perhaps the hon. member didn't want to hear because it would take away from the second question that he just asked.

HRG in their business plan indicate that they will provide services for third-party payers. They will provide rehabilitation services to whatever the corresponding entity to WCB is in Ontario, and they will provide uninsured services. It's my clear understanding, Mr. Speaker, that that is what the King's facility in Toronto provides. So there is very much a direct parallel, and that to me is very much a fact.

Further, Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me, I would like to refer to another party in the Assembly. It isn't usually the case that I would give credit to them, but where credit is due I do want to provide it. That is that I suggest, although it would perhaps cut down on the extraneous questions, that the hon. Leader of the Opposition contact the HRG group, their administration, and ask to sit down with them, because that, I understand, is the approach that the NDP opposition has taken. They are quite prepared to sit down and meet, and they have also indicated to us this morning that they are quite prepared to sit down with them and give to them their business plan and go over it with them so they have a better understanding of what is proposed.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, why should we believe what the minister is reporting today about what he was told in a private meeting with Mr. Saunders this morning when Mr. Saunders has very clearly publicly stated that he wants to do insured services in his hospital and that he wants his hospital to provide overflow beds when the underfunded public system can't meet the demand in Calgary?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I say, it would really be helpful to the hon. Leader of the Opposition to actually sit down, look at the business plan, and get some of the facts of the particular case.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that I think the Leader of the Opposition is ignoring the fact that at least once and, I think, more times than that in this Assembly I've indicated that in terms of any contracts for insured services, which are pretty common across this country – and there are some in Alberta with respect to regional health authorities. I have communicated with all regional health authorities in the province indicating that before any such contractual relationships are entered into with HRG or any other like entity, I want to review them to make sure they conform to the principles of the Canada Health Act and approve them.

MR. MITCHELL: The American health care system, Mr. Speaker, costs twice as much per person per year to run as the Alberta health care system. To the Minister of Health: why, then, is he driving us towards a system that is going to cost us so much more money than the one we already have?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer is that I am not doing that. I am not driving this system towards any kind of American model.

With respect to the cost of the American health care system I do not claim to be an expert on it, but I have certainly made it my business as part of my responsibilities to be aware of what is not adequate, not good in other national systems and also to try and look at the European continent and some other areas where we might learn something.

MR. MITCHELL: The minister has admitted that he will allow private insured services to be contracted to HRG. How can the minister, once he's factored in the 15 or 20 percent profit that HRG has to make, believe that that private hospital can do these services less expensively than the public hospitals?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, I have clearly indicated – let us take the example of the Workers' Compensation Board, which does need uninsured services. They have, I think, contracted in other parts of the country with companies for rehabilitation services. They have found that these services were satisfactory. They are uninsured services outside the Canada Health Act. I'm sure that WCB with its very good track record – and the Minister of Labour might want to elucidate or inform the Assembly on that – has capable management and is quite capable of making the judgment with respect to cost-effective care as far as rehabilitation services are concerned.

MR. MITCHELL: Given that the minister is trying to make HRG doing WCB work seem quite benign, will he tell us or has he even assessed what the effect on the public health care system will be once WCB's \$74 million in health care services is yanked from the public system and plunked on a private hospital?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the offering of rehabilitation services, as I just indicated, has been going on under contract arrangements as far as Workers' Compensation Board type services in this country for some time, and our public health care system is still functioning quite well, thank you.

In terms of yanking away something or being detrimental to the public health care system, Mr. Speaker, I think that this will be a judgment for WCB to make. The health care system will be there; it will be offering quality service. When the member sometimes indicates that the public health care system is too busy, this might be a good balance and set of relationships.

THE SPEAKER: Third opposition main question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Tradespeople's Training

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A skilled labour shortage is looming in this province. The Minister of Labour seems to think that the solution is just to permit tradesmen from the United States to have access to jobs in this province. A recent study commissioned for the department predicts a shortage in all the major skilled trades, including boilermakers, carpenters, pipefitters, electricians, and welders. My questions today are to the minister of advanced education. How much of this shortage does the department anticipate will be addressed by the implementation of the Alberta qualification certificate program?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the program that the member is talking about is one of the initiatives that of course we are bringing forward in terms of the business plan with Advanced Education and Career Development, but at this point in time I'm not familiar enough with all of the details of that initiative to respond in the fullness that I wish to here in question period.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite surprised. I have an information update released by the minister's department regarding this.

Will these examinations under the Alberta qualification certificate program be the same as those written by students participating in an accredited course, and will the graduates of this test be eligible for Alberta and interprovincial red seal tickets?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Good question.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I just heard from some fellow colleagues across the way that that was a good question, and indeed it is a good question. If he wanted a good answer – I think he's probably had it in his possession for more than five minutes. I would ask him and other members in the future: if you want answers like that, all you have to do is pick up the telephone, advise me that you're going to have a question like this in question period, and I'll ensure that I have the information here for you.

1:50

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the answers to these questions are not in the minister's information update.

Maybe he can answer this question: what assurances does the minister have that his department's policy of increasing tuition fees to 30 percent of an institute's net operating costs will not just further add to this looming labour shortage?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, finally we're into some of the policy aspects, Mr. Speaker.

I think the positions of the various parties prior to the last election were quite clear as it came to tuition policy. I for one, as a member seeking re-election, was quite forthright I believe in all of the public statements that I made that I was in favour of a policy here in the province of Alberta of tuitions rising in a graduated way to 30 percent of net operating cost.

What we're actually finding, Mr. Speaker, is that under this tuition policy, rather than the sky-is-falling type of attitude that is inferred by our hon. questioner today, the access that we're working so hard to achieve is actually working. Our enrollment is up practically right across the board. So what we're finding is that citizens of Alberta are actually responding to the need for them to invest in their careers. We're not finding some of the dire predictions that were predicted by some of our opposition people not only before the recent election but certainly since that time.

Health Resource Group Inc.

(continued)

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the most important distinction between the King's health centre in Toronto and the HRG facility now under way in Calgary is that the HRG is proposing to have 37 inpatient care beds and the King's centre in Toronto has no inpatient beds. Listen to this though. This is from their own people: King's houses a group of general practitioners carrying on regular OHIP practice and takes 40 percent of their OHIP fees to cover overhead; that indirect OHIP funding has given King's a boost. I'll give you a quote and get to the question: it's allowed us to start the engine of the King's health centre and get that critical mass in terms of revenue, says Scott Addison, King's senior vice-president. Knowing this, how can the Minister of Health allow HRG to proceed when it's very clear that a place that doesn't even have inpatient beds has to double-dip in order to survive?

THE SPEAKER: Minister of Health, before you proceed.

Hon. member, yesterday and now for the first time today there have been a fair number of quotations from documents. The Speaker indicated last week that if an hon. member chose to quote from a document, please have the appropriate copies ready for tabling in the Assembly as well.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that it actually is very important to this particular question to just reiterate that the government is firmly committed to adhering to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Now, the King's entity, which the Liberals seem to feel is the ideal, nevertheless does have this issue of physicians charging the public health care insurance plan in Ontario, and outside of this particular obligation these physicians are working in the King's institution. It's my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that there has been no objection to that raised by the federal government regarding interpretations and applications of the Canada Health Act.

MS BARRETT: Shame on them. Shame on them.

MR. JONSON: The hon. member of the NDP opposition is making various remarks which I hope she will redirect to the Liberal Party.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, this particular procedure, as I understand it, is not contrary to the Canada Health Act.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, Minister of Health, and other members, before you proceed, please direct your comments through the Chair. The Chair will in turn direct them to an hon. member.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, it is profoundly clear that a place that isn't even calling itself a hospital can't survive without double-dipping. Is the Health minister prepared to guarantee that if HRG opens its doors, they will never be able to bill the Alberta health care system for one iota of service? Guarantee it.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I will guarantee that HRG will conform to the principles of the Canada Health Act and the interpretations thereof. As I've said, I have a very serious concern about making sure that contracts that might be arrived at with regional health authorities are appropriate for the Alberta context, and I will monitor those and make sure that I deal with the approval thereof.

A very important point here, Mr. Speaker, is that across this country we have certain precedents that have already been set. I do not think that Alberta should be singled out for attention here. I think there is a general concern that the hon. member has, but we are conforming to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and we are very concerned and dedicated to preserving a top quality health care system publicly funded in this province.

MS BARRETT: My final question is to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier justify picking a phony fight with the federal government, assuming that the other western provinces are going to go along with him, knowing that the New Democrat governments of Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Yukon absolutely do not agree with this government's policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it goes far beyond this single issue. The issue is one of achieving what we like to call flexible federalism. The Prime Minister himself referred to flexible federalism where indeed there are national guidelines, not arbitrary federal government guidelines, with respect to health, education, and social welfare. What we are attempting to achieve – and there is a process in place. As a matter of fact, the Minister of Family and Social Services is the co-chairman along with the hon. Mr. Pettigrew from Ottawa to achieve this kind of flexible federalism, to achieve the rebalancing of the roles and responsibilities of the federal government and the provincial governments, to restore to the provinces the constitutional authority that is in fact the responsibility of the provinces. If you look at the revised Constitution of 1982, you will see quite clearly and without qualification that the provinces do indeed have the constitutional authority for health, education, and social welfare.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: To all the visitors in the galleries: what usually happens in question period is that the first three questions are initiated by the Leader of the Opposition, the fourth question by the leader of the second opposition party, and there tends to be a little exuberance from time to time. It tends to go down when we begin the next series of questions.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Intercountry Adoptions

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services. Some of my constituents have recently expressed concerns relating to recent changes Romania has made to their intercountry adoption policies, which make adoption outside that country conditional that a jurisdiction is considered to be a Hague ratified jurisdiction. In 1994 Canada signed an agreement to implement The Hague convention on intercountry adoption. It deals with international standards for international adoptions. I understand that each province now has to ratify the convention by passing legislation in order for the province to be considered a Hague ratified jurisdiction. Has this happened in Alberta?

2:00

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I would like to do to start off with is to illustrate the problem that the hon. member has brought forward. I would like to quote, and I'd be more than happy to table this. This is from Larry and Angela Reimer.

We have completed . . . our paper work [to adopt a child in Romania] and have paid between 6 - 7 thousand dollars up to this point. We have a baby girl proposed to us . . . [However, each province must ratify] . . . The 'Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption.'

Alberta has not . . . done this, (B.C., Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, and PEI have) and if they don't, our adoption is in jeopardy and can be cancelled!! We are very concerned about this!

Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about this issue as well. In '95-96 there were 18 such adoptions in Alberta. That has increased to 48 adoptions last year, and we are seeing a steady rise. There will be a Bill brought before this Legislature that will ratify The Hague convention on intercountry adoptions this session.

MR. MARZ: To the same minister: what are the ramifications or the implications of not ratifying this agreement?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, using again the case of Larry and Angela Reimer, quite simply they would not be able to adopt the child that they had promised to them and that they had paid \$6,000 or \$7,000 that they have put out in paper work.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important piece of legislation that will be brought before the Legislative Assembly, and quite simply if we don't pass it this session, those people, such as Larry and Angela Reimer, will not be able to adopt a child from out of country.

MR. MARZ: I thank the minister for being so thorough again as to answer my third question.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Securities Regulation

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Securities Commission recently joined a new national steering committee which will review the mining finance regulatory processes across Canada. However, the regulators have already concluded that there are no systemic flaws in our stock market systems despite the news that there are at least two more companies besides Bre-X

that have stated that their gold samples may have been salted. One of these companies is out of Calgary. Surprisingly, both the Provincial Treasurer and the minister responsible for consumer and corporate affairs have been silent in protecting Albertans' interests. My first question is to the Provincial Treasurer. Will the Provincial Treasurer now mandate that there be a public review of the rules of both the Alberta Securities Commission and the Alberta Stock Exchange?

MR. DAY: Just a minor correction first, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the Treasurer being silent: there has been no silence on this issue. There's been clear communication to the Stock Exchange here and also through to Toronto that an incident like Bre-X, which members opposite continue to talk about, triggers in fact quite a series of reviews at various levels with all stakeholders to see if there's need for improvement.

The member opposite may have missed an extensive article that was out just yesterday on a survey already done by the Toronto Stock Exchange in terms of key North American investors, each of whom said, following the review that's been done to date, that they see no major flaws in the system. People acknowledge that a bank can be robbed. Someone can walk in and rob a bank. It doesn't necessarily mean that there's something wrong with the Bank Act, but it does give an opportunity to review the Act. That is being done.

MS LEIBOVICI: My second question is to the minister responsible for consumer affairs. Will that minister ensure that any consultation on the rules will include stockholders?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I will have to provide more information relative to the actual Stock Exchange. I'm not sure that that's within the purview of my responsibility, but I'll be better informed next time.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would hope that someone is looking after the consumers' and stockholders' interests with regards to this matter.

My third question is back to the Provincial Treasurer. Will he at least ensure that the Alberta Securities Commission will look at shortening the reporting period for insider trading?

MR. DAY: Again, Mr. Speaker, everything is being looked at in terms of the operational guidelines and the security guidelines. There's a strong sense returning already following this incident that has taken place that in fact we do have a vibrant exchange here, and it is allowing for investors to continue to capitalize and move ahead with their hopes and their dreams. That review is ongoing, not just in the area mentioned but in areas not even mentioned by the member opposite. This is an ongoing review, and it's being done carefully and it's being done with a view to investors and to protection, also recognizing that you can regulate something to the point of stifling it and stagnating it. So there's a balance there, but I can tell you there's a very vigorous, very aggressive review that's in place of all the provisions related to the exchange.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2005 World's Fair

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Expo 2005 is not only

important to Alberta and Calgary but will be very important and have a changing impact on Victoria Park, an inner-city community within my riding. My question is to the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs. What has the government done to maximize the chance of successful bidding as we are in the last dash for the June 12 voting?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, Expo 2005 is a partnership effort between the Expo 2005 bid committee, the city of Calgary, provincial and federal governments, and many people in the private sector and many volunteer organizations. Since Calgary decided to vie against Nagoya, Japan, for the right to host Expo 2005, this government has been a very strong supporter of that bid, and most specifically the government has met with the BIE countries. The Premier has made contact with a number of those countries to encourage them to support the bid. In every diplomatic visit and every visit of an ambassador or a high commissioner or other official to our province we always take the time to work into that conversation support for and a request for their support for the 2005 bid. There have been outgoing calls to other countries that are supporting, and in fact in the near future some of our ministers, including the Premier, will be visiting some of those countries. We will not be releasing the itineraries for those visits, because of course it's a very competitive process. The ongoing effort to assist Calgary and the Expo 2005 committee to obtain the bid is going on before the June 12 vital vote.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Are there any attempts to tap into the experience of Vancouver's Expo '86 as far as the relationship with the voting member nations?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Expo '86 bid was of course a bit of a different situation in that Vancouver, as I understand it and as I recall, was asked to take over the organization of that Expo when the originally selected host country had to back out. But, in fact, as I understand it, Patrick Reid, who was the commissioner general for Expo '86, and David Podmore, who was a key consultant on the design and the development of the Expo '86 site, have both been involved as advisers to the Expo 2005 committee.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. As far as experience from Expo '86 in Vancouver, is there anything we should learn and do for the community where the Expo site is located?

MR. HANCOCK: Again, Mr. Speaker, the Expo '86 situation was significantly different from the situation in Calgary, but as I understand it, the bid committee and the city of Calgary have been working in close consultation with the Victoria Park community. There's ongoing consulting and a commitment, as I understand it, from the bid committee to ensure that there will be a lasting legacy which will enhance the Victoria Park community.

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

2:10

Children's Services

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the regionalization of children's services is cause for grave concern for many parents and employees who access and work in the system. These

concerns have necessitated tablings on both sides of the House and also have been incorporated in a memo from myself to the Minister of Family and Social Services and the minister without portfolio, which I am prepared to table in the Assembly today. While the government contends that it is consulting with stakeholders, parents specifically are raising that meetings are being conducted during business hours, when it is difficult for them to attend, and that information provided is conflicting and difficult to understand. In the absence of the minister without portfolio I would like to address my questions to the . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, it's prohibited by the rules to mention the presence or the absence of an hon. member in the House. Please proceed.

MRS. SLOAN: To the Minister of Family and Social Services: on May 1 the minister without portfolio responsible for children's services stated about regionalization meetings, "As a matter of fact, there are some minutes that are being kept." Would the minister responsible please table these minutes in the Assembly?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of the minutes that are being kept. However, I imagine that they are, and I imagine that the hon. minister in charge of children's services will certainly be more than happy to table them in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, this has been a very interesting type of movement in the last little while. First of all, there's a couple of things that I would like to make perfectly clear. One of the issues – and the hon. member has alluded to them in the tablings of letters such as today by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. They have been from parents of handicapped children who are concerned about the block funding. Jonathan Murphy, who is presently a Liberal candidate in the federal election, is the one who has been in charge of this funding committee. The funding formula is not done yet.

MRS. SLOAN: A point of order.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the funding committee is still working, and I have not seen the draft of this committee. Thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: Given that the commissioner for children's services is expecting service regions to submit service delivery plans within the next two months, will the Minister of Family and Social Services table the standards set out by the province for the delivery of children's services?

DR. OBERG: As we went through this very interesting process, as I stated early, which has been going on for about three years, there have been four pillars that the committees in the 18 different regions have been requested to follow. These include things such as early intervention, such as aboriginal children. Mr. Speaker, we are seeing the fruition of this gradually coming forward. I have received to date two plans. We are looking at them very carefully. As I have said in the past, there will be no plan go forward until it is approved by the minister.

MRS. SLOAN: Given that the province has yet to outline standards for children's services, will the minister advise the House what steps have been taken to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness, comprehensiveness, and safety of regional services for children in this province?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the development of standards is a very key component to any children's services delivery. It's something that we feel very strongly about and something that we are working very hard for at the moment.

With the initiative being still in its infancy, we are just receiving the plans from the regions. The Department of Family and Social Services is working very hard with the regions to develop these standards. Mr. Speaker, this is something that we feel is extremely important. It is something that we feel must be in place before the service delivery component of the regional authorities for children's services are put down, and it's something that we're working very hard at at the moment. Unfortunately, they're not ready yet.

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

Distribution of Obscene Material

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A series of videos called *Faces of Death* is openly available to our children and youth. Prolonged scenes in these videos are graphic, showing human degradation, animal abuse, violence, torture, and murder. I understand that Ontario and B.C. have banned these videos because of their gruesome and violent content while Alberta has not. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Why is this gruesome video allowed in our province, or at the very least, why is it made readily available to our children and youth?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there's a couple of points that should be made on this issue. I personally have not seen these videos, nor do I intend to, but I do understand that they are quite disturbing. I think it's important for us to remember that in Alberta videos and films that are intended for public showings are reviewed and they are classified. However, material that is intended for private viewing, such as videos, is not. Whether it's CDs, videos, books, the Internet – another good point – things that are intended for private use are not classified by us.

I personally think that parents have to take some great responsibility for what their children view. Most of these video machines are in the home, and certainly I would hope that parents have access. I also believe that store owners should take some responsibility for the material that they carry, and I understand that a store in Red Deer has pulled this material from their store in response to community standards. I think that's extremely important in our province. I think that if people are offended by this, they should tell the store owners that, because the corporate community can play their part in this.

As well, the Criminal Code of Canada certainly carries provisions that materials that are offensive in nature cannot come into the country. I think that if Albertans are concerned about this and want to file a complaint, they should do that with the police, which would be then referred to Alberta Justice, and it could be reviewed in that way.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Will the minister consider legislation restricting the availability of videos that are violent or sexually explicit to people that are 18 years or older?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, I would remind all members that it is the federal Criminal Code that governs

distribution of obscene materials. I also am aware by reviewing the Order Paper that the Member for Calgary-Cross has a motion that she is bringing forward that is somewhat on this matter, although it seems to deal with sexual material more than violence, but she may want to look at that. I think that we should consider this, I think we should talk about it, and I look forward to the debate on that motion.

As I said in my earlier response, Mr. Speaker, if we are going to deal with this issue, then we are going to be faced with the larger issue of books, of the Internet, of CDs, materials such as that. We can ask the video store owners to keep material that isn't suitable away from children, to label it appropriately, and I would say that most stores voluntarily do this. So the consideration of legislation is one that I think Albertans should talk about, but I would want them to be aware of the broader picture if we enter that milieu.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Justice. Will the minister consider recommending to the federal Minister of Justice that a review of the Criminal Code be undertaken to include provisions for graphically violent, obscene material being made for sale or rent?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I have reviewed the Criminal Code provisions, and the hon. member and the minister are correct. Right now the Criminal Code does not preclude the distribution of this material. Part of the problem is that the definition of obscene materials relates primarily to a sexual context and it does not relate to violence.

What I'd be more than prepared to do is pursue this at the federal level. I think it's an important issue. We could also look at banning the material, very difficult, however, in light of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Another avenue of attack – and I would again support the minister in this – may be looking at what we can do to preclude the availability of these materials to young people, and certainly we'd be happy to look at that. So we'll take two approaches: one on the federal level and certainly one at the provincial level with the minister and the member.

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

2:20

Forest Conservation

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, recently when questioned about the Alberta forest conservation strategy, the Minister of Environmental Protection said that he would continue to set aside areas in the forest regions under the special places program. The strategy, which was signed off by industry, public stakeholders, the federal government, and the minister's own department, states that protected areas must exclude industrial development and other activities that disturb the land surface. Will the Minister of Environmental Protection ensure that industrial development is excluded from protected areas as required by the forest conservation strategy?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the hon. member has got a number of things confused here today. The forest conservation strategy is not a protected areas document. It certainly deals with the overall value of the forest and the forested land, but it is meant to be a strategy to deal with those areas. It's not the protected areas document. The protected areas document is one dealing with the special places.

MS CARLSON: The minister is mixing apples and oranges here, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask him the question again. Will he ensure that industrial development is excluded from protected areas as required by the document you have in your hands from the forest conservation strategy?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is totally confused. The forest conservation strategy was never meant to be a protected areas document.

MS CARLSON: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. LUND: I don't know if she's looking at some draft that I'm not aware of, but it was never intended to be a program for the protected spaces program.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, one more time. The forest conservation strategy made recommendations and stated clearly that industrial development needed to be excluded from protected areas, and I'm asking the minister if he agrees with that document or not. It's signed by your own department.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, once again, the forest conservation strategy is not an endangered spaces program document. As far as the recommendations that are contained in the forest conservation strategy, we are studying those recommendations. It's really interesting because, in fact, an awful lot of the recommendations in the forest conservation strategy have already been implemented, but we will be looking at the other recommendations in the document. Clearly the forest conservation strategy document is not, never was intended to be an endangered species or endangered spaces document.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Teacher Certification

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, quality education is a priority in my constituency, and the qualifications and training of our teachers is an important aspect of that quality education. With the growth of our private schools and the expansion of our public system, the ability to attract and hire qualified teachers is an important aspect of our Alberta advantage. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Education. Does Alberta recognize teachers trained in other jurisdictions and countries, and how do they receive certification to teach in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, having traveled to many schools in the province both in the public and in the private system, I can say that the province does attract a very high calibre of teacher, including teachers that come from other jurisdictions. The short answer to the question is: yes, Alberta does recognize teachers trained in other jurisdictions throughout Canada as well as other countries.

In order to be teachers in this province, Mr. Speaker, they must first be eligible for certification here in the province of Alberta. The criteria for certification here in the province of Alberta mean that they must be first of all a Canadian citizen or a landed immigrant, they must hold an equivalent degree to Alberta's bachelor of education degree, and they must also be certified to teach in the jurisdiction or the country from which they received their education degree equivalent.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you. My first supplemental question to the same minister: can teachers who are not certified teach in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, to answer this question, I do have to give a little bit of background on the types of schools that are here in the province of Alberta. First of all, of course, there are the public schools, and I include within the public school description the description of Catholic schools. Secondly, there are charter schools, which are public schools that operate within the province of Alberta. Thirdly, there are private schools. Private schools are further divided into two different kinds of schools. First of all, there are accredited private schools, and secondly, there are those that are registered. Those schools that receive public funding or are accredited must use certified teachers.

So there are some schools, Mr. Speaker, in this province that do use noncertified teachers, but those are only in the registered private schools. The number of students and schools that fall within that category is a very, very small number compared to the over 500,000 students that go to school in our province's schools.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With parents and educators both nationally and internationally recognizing the educational value of the Montessori program, why does the Department of Education fail to recognize Montessori teacher training for this certification? This should be an arm's-length professional process.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly have heard from a number of parents who choose to send their sons or daughters to Montessori schools. We do in this province accept that the Montessori method of teaching is a training program that teachers can take after they have been certified. However, most government certification bodies agree that Montessori training is an alternative teaching delivery program and cannot stand alone and for that reason is not recognized by itself as being a proper criterion for certification for teachers.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has expired.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Today we have three member's statements. First of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, then the hon. Member for St. Albert.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Alberta Children's Hospital

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I bring to the attention of the House that on Friday, May 23, the Alberta Children's hospital, which is in my constituency, will be formally celebrating its 75th birthday. Recognizing that our province itself is only 92 years old, one comes to appreciate the significant role this institution has played in our history. I'd like to bring members' attention to a feature that was done in the *Calgary Herald* last weekend by Wendy Dudley, in which she outlines a number of the chronological events and strengthens the aspect of this hospital in our community.

From its humble beginnings as the Junior Red Cross Children's hospital, which opened in a small home on 18th Avenue a number of years ago, it then moved in 1929 to its second location in

Mount Royal. There they housed 55 children, most of them orthopedic patients. Later, Mr. Speaker, as they developed their own ability to facilitate the building of crutches and braces, they actually moved to their present site on 17th Avenue and Richmond Road. At that time, they had started to develop their presence in the community as health care undertook a whole different perspective with respect to children. Today parents stay and visit over a 24-hour period, and indeed the Gordon Townsend school is on that site.

Mr. Speaker, the future for the Children's hospital lies in a number of areas. One is the community aspect of children's care and the fact that we have a less-walled institutional model which brings health care into the community. We're also focusing on preventative medicine and ambulatory care. About 65 percent of the hospital's patients are already treated in an outreach model.

The Children's offers a multidisciplinary approach to child care in health care systems. They embrace the province's Education, social services, and Justice departments. Mr. Speaker, they are an example of an integrated government delivery system that had been in place long before even our own government started to restructure.

I would welcome all Albertans and particularly this Legislature to recognize the staff, the families, and most importantly the patients of the Alberta Children's hospital, especially this weekend.

Thank you.

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

2:30

DARE Program

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year millions of school children worldwide are learning to say no to drugs through the drug abuse resistance education program, otherwise known as DARE, which helps children to make decisions on their own and shows them how to identify positive alternatives to the use of drugs. Those of us who attended graduation ceremonies of students who have participated in the DARE program are aware of the significant positive impacts that this program has made on those children. For example, in a recent DARE graduation ceremony at Meadowlark school students' testimonials on how the program had changed their lives brought tears to many in the audience.

In Alberta we're particularly fortunate as the Edmonton Police Service has become the first in Canada to be a training centre for DARE officers. Last Friday the second class of police officers from across Canada graduated after undergoing an intensive two-week training program here. These officers will be able to provide DARE training to students from kindergarten to grade 6. What is noteworthy is that this worthwhile program's funding is mostly derived from fund-raising efforts from Edmonton Police Service officers, and this program has flourished because of police officers' personal time and commitment to the program.

If the Minister of Justice is looking for a worthwhile preventative program to place some of his crime prevention dollars, then this one is it. The success of this program is evident, as in less than four years the DARE program has grown in the Edmonton area alone from three schools to 57 schools, and it now has 80 more schools on a wait list. There are many other schools across Alberta that are currently benefiting from this program and many more waiting to access it.

I am positive that all of us commend the Edmonton Police Service for its commitment to DARE and that we also wish to recognize the efforts of both the Edmonton police and RCMP

instructors and co-ordinators. Today in particular let us also congratulate those officers who recently graduated from across Canada who are so obviously dedicated to crime prevention by ensuring that our youth know how to say no to drugs.

Thank you.

Northern Alberta International Children's Festival

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, this week St. Albert is hosting the Northern Alberta International Children's Festival for what our local paper called five fun-soaked days of colourful insight and sound. In spite of the weather the festival expects to draw thousands of visitors and features performers from all four corners of the globe. It's entitled 'Swingin' in the Rainforest and is built around the theme of rain forests of the world.

The festival will draw participants into learning more about this rich ecosystem. Visitors can enjoy the beauty of a specially created rain forest waterfall, constructed as well as natural. Other delights include workshops in saving water and making art from recycled paper. There are 13 main acts and a delightful array of sight happenings for all young children and children in adult bodies.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge the fine work of the organizers of this children's festival for providing a venue of fantasy, the right of every child to enjoy the wonders of their universe. I would like to congratulate all participating artists for nurturing the play world of children. Finally, I would like to invite all members of this Assembly, guests, and families to come to St. Albert, on the banks of the Sturgeon River, and to enjoy the festival entertainers and the appealing ambience of Alberta's oldest established community, St. Albert.

Projected Government Business

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I request that the Government House Leader, pursuant to Standing Orders, now provide the Assembly with details of projected government business for next week.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to reply to that request by indicating to this House that on Monday, May 26, under Government Bills and Orders it would be anticipated that second reading would proceed on Bill 11 and Bill 15, that we might then proceed into Committee of the Whole to deal with Bill 14, Bill 2, and Bill 1. In the evening we might proceed with second reading on Bill 10, Bill 16, Bill 17, and Bill 18. Time permitting, Committee of the Whole might then deal with Bill 8, Bill 13, and Bill 1.

On Tuesday, May 27, third reading could proceed on Bill 3 and Bill 12, with second reading of Bill 10 and in the evening on May 27 third reading of Bill 14 and second reading of Bills 16, 17, and 18.

On Wednesday, May 28, we would hope to proceed with second reading of Bill 11, Bill 15, and Bill 10 and into Committee of the Whole with Bill 13, Bill 5, and Bill 1.

On Thursday, May 29, it would be hoped that we could proceed with Royal Assent on Bill 3, Bill 4, Bill 9, Bill 12, Bill 14, and Bill 209;* Government Motion 19, concurrence in the report reappointing the Ethics Commissioner and Information and Privacy Commissioner; and Committee of the Whole on Bill 1.

THE SPEAKER: Before dealing with the points of order today, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

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

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this House a gentleman who is sitting in the public gallery, Mr. James McMillan. Mr. McMillan is an observer of the political scene in this city and in this province. He has advised me in the past, and I hope he will continue to do so in the future. If I could have him stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Point of Order
Parliamentary Language

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise on a point of order arising out of question period this afternoon, and in particular I believe it was the first main question from the Leader of the Opposition, at which time he indicated that the Premier was misleading the House or had misled the House. I'd rise under 23(h) and (i) and under *Beauchesne* 486, 487, and 489.

Not only was it evident from further questions in question period, particularly from the leader of the ND Party wherein she indicated through the information she provided the House that it was not correct that the Premier was misleading the House, but it is unparliamentary in our submission for the Leader of the Official Opposition to make that accusation. In particular *Beauchesne* 489 indicates that the expressions "deliberately misled" or "deliberately misleading" have been termed unparliamentary as well as the terms "mislead" or "misleading the public." I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that misleading the House is as bad if not worse than misleading the public and therefore should also be determined unparliamentary.

Making allegations, 23(h): I think an allegation was being made against the Premier which was unfounded and imputed false or unavowed motives.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I think that a careful reading of *Hansard* will show that the remarks attributed to the Leader of the Opposition were in fact not the remarks that he raised during the exchange in question period that the Deputy Government House Leader refers to.

Secondly, as far as the citations from *Beauchesne*, particularly under 489, I will direct the Deputy Government House Leader and of course yourself, Mr. Speaker, to *Beauchesne* 486(4), which reads:

Remarks which do not appear on the public record and are therefore private conversations not heard by the Chair do not invite the intervention of the Speaker.

So I'm not sure exactly what the Deputy Government House Leader is referring to as regards the leader of the ND opposition. [interjection] I'm sorry, of course, to bore the hon. Treasurer, but maybe he could just keep that mock stage-yawn to himself while we proceed with this point of order, because it is a serious accusation the Deputy Government House Leader has raised.

Also under 486(2) it reads: "An expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week." This of course suggests the time-honoured tradition of contextualizing remarks that may or may not be considered unparliamentary or inflammatory.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, the Premier, in response to a question in question period yesterday, used the following language, and I am quoting directly from *Hansard* of May 21, page 656.

*See page 713, right col., para. 4, line 4

The federal Liberals seem to think that this is okay, because, as I understand it, this is what the group in Calgary is talking about.

The one-year-old King's health centre, as I understand it, has "grouped together a number of non-insured medical services and is aggressively marketing them to Canadians and foreigners."

Mr. Speaker, the director of HRG has said and the government has admitted that they are contemplating the provision of insured services. This is a dramatic difference between what the two business plans call for. King's is marketing not-insured services; HRG hopes to market insured services. The Premier specifically informed the House that King's and HRG are the same, and they're not on at least that point and on several other points. So it was perfectly appropriate for the Leader of the Official Opposition in his line of questioning to ask the Premier to clarify why he either misunderstood or misinformed this Assembly about health care policy and health care practice in this province.

There is clearly no point of order. It is a thin and weak attempt to defend the misstatements of the Premier or his attempt to try to lull Albertans into some sense of false security about the state of their health care system.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. members, for your articulate debate with respect to this particular matter. Certainly *Beauchesne* 486(2) has been expressed by one hon. member already today, and I quote it for the benefit of all members.

An expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week.

He really provides for a great deal of wisdom required of the Chair and an attempt to be like a Solomon.

Now, Deputy Government House Leader, many of your arguments were based on the presumption that the word in question was "misled" or "misleading." I want to quote from the Blues from this afternoon. Toward the end the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition said: and that the Premier misinformed the House yesterday about those differences. The key word here is "misinformed." I would like to draw all hon. members to *Beauchesne* 490, where it says: "Since 1958, it has been ruled parliamentary to use the following expressions," including "misinforming." Now, "misinformed" is not exactly the same as "misinforming," but the Chair would suggest that they're almost, in this context, one and the same. So that's that for that point of order.

Edmonton-Riverview, you had a point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to Persons by Name

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Speaker's ruling earlier this session and 23(j). The Speaker's ruling that I speak of was specifically that hon. members should use caution when naming individuals, particularly if those individuals are not in the House to defend themselves, and 23(j) is: "uses . . . language of a nature likely to create disorder."

To put this point of order in context, the questions that were being asked of the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services were specifically to encourage the minister to table minutes and information, other documentation related to the children's services restructuring in the province. In response to those very reasonable requests, the minister chose to incite disorder by naming an individual not currently a member of the House or present today. It so happens that that individual is a federal candidate for the Liberal Party.

It may very well be that the member named had an involvement with respect to the restructuring of children's services. However,

I do not believe that the minister's response was intended to do anything at all except to incite disorder and to perhaps suggest to some degree some irresponsibility on the part of Jonathan Murphy.

Thank you.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I rise to say that on 23(j) there is no point of order. When the hon. member first got up, in her preamble she talked about handicapped children's services, how letters are being tabled. What I was attempting to do was to explain to the hon. member the way in which the funding formula – if the letters that were tabled today could be read, that is what they were about: the way the funding formula was derived, the way it was brought out into the public, and more importantly, who did it. It is very plain that we contracted out to Jonathan Murphy, who is the person who was involved in the funding formula, to do the funding formula for the children's services plan. I don't know how else I could have said it when it would not have been inflammatory apart from stating a simple fact.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair listened attentively in fact to the question and answer as they were being done this afternoon, and I did certainly hear the name Jonathan Murphy and certainly did hear the Minister of Family and Social Services indicate that the hon. gentleman was a candidate in an election. The Chair tried at the time to find the connection between what that position was and any concern that may have come forward in a derogatory way, and the Chair did not hear at that time that there was anything derogatory.

Now, there may have been an inference in someone's understanding of this or in listening to this that with the individual in question, because he was participating in his democratic right as a candidate, perhaps because he was participating, there was some delay in getting something done. But it was not clear to the Chair at the time that that had been stated as an absolute fact. Now, there may have been an inference, and that causes a dilemma in terms of a point of order.

The Chair would like to point out to all members not the citations that were used by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview nor the defence claimed by the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services but would like to draw to their attention *Beauchesne* 493(4). The Speaker has cautioned members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and are unable to reply. This is not a place for idle name-dropping. There can be reverberations and consequences to individuals outside of this House from statements made by individual members inside of this House about them, and they are in no position whatsoever to come in here and explain, defend, or anything else. So it's a clarification, again, that I think is very, very important, not the citations from either the Member for Edmonton-Riverview or the hon. minister but in this case directly from *Beauchesne*.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Point of Order

Accusations against a Member

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). The minister, in his response to my question earlier this afternoon, stated that I was confused. I would like to point out that in this particular instance, this time it's the minister who is confused.

My question had nothing to do with his news release today which deals with Special Places 2000. It had everything to do with the Alberta forest conservation strategy, a strategy which "was prepared by a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee appointed by Alberta's Minister of Environmental Protection," a strategy which has been released and is in the minister's hands and which "will guide the policies and actions of all of those [people] who [use] the forests of Alberta, now and for decades to come," as it states in its opening statement.

Clearly in this document, under strategic direction it talks about the need to "exclude industrial development and other activities that disturb the land," and I clearly do need an answer from this minister on this in terms of whether or not he intends to comply with this requirement of the forest conservation strategy, which is in fact signed by two people who work for him, Cliff Henderson and Dave Walker.

So in terms of the point of order, it's the wrong person who was named to be confused in this Legislature, and I hope he will stand up and reply to the question in writing, because we do need an answer.

2:50

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the confusion in the hon. member's mind continues. The fact is that if she would look at the terms of reference, she would clearly find that it was never intended to be an endangered spaces or an endangered species document. Truly, it was to set the parameters and direction that we would use in managing the forest in the future.

I'm not sure where this is coming from. I believe that it's probably coming from some that were attempting – attempting – to rewrite the special places program and that she has been confused by their actions and is now bringing it into the House. When the government does produce the response to the forest conservation strategy, we will clearly see that it will address the terms of reference for the strategy as it was laid out when the committees were first formed and when a number of communities signed on to the program to have input. The 800 people that did in fact participate were looking at it as a guide for the management of the forest, Mr. Speaker.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, this document is a forest conservation strategy, which clearly states that they need to exclude industrial development. I will table a copy and send it to him.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please. The hon. member did have an opportunity to make her argument with respect to this purported point of order, and the hon. minister responded. In listening to the exchange this afternoon to the question between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and the hon. Minister of Environmental Protection, essentially the hon. member raised a question, and the hon. minister responded; the hon. member raised the question again, and the hon. minister responded in the same way; the hon. member raised the question again, and the hon. minister responded in the same way.

During this interchange, if the Chair is correct – and he will review the Blues this weekend – he certainly heard the Minister of Environmental Protection use the phrase "confused" on more than one occasion. The Chair also thinks, however, that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said that the Minister of Environmental Protection was confusing apples with oranges, and therein the use of the word "confused" was multiplied. The Chair would like to suggest that there may be some confusion of all members in understanding all of this, and over the next three days we might

just get the document, read it, and determine what the authenticity is completely.

Hon. member, the frustration you may have is that you may demand an answer from the hon. minister. The hon. minister will give an answer. It may not be the answer that the hon. member is looking for, is requiring or demanding or may even believe is an answer. But there's nothing in the rules that requires a minister to answer the question in the manner intended by the person who raises the question.

So I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind that in the ensuing days and weeks and months of this session there will be ample opportunity for debate on Bills or motions that might allow us to clarify this, and we can continue the process of absolute clarification with specific questions on Monday and proceed on that basis.

head: **Projected Government Business**
(continued)

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, just as a matter of clarification. When I was talking about government business, I read that we would deal with Bill 209 on May 29. In fact, that must be a typographical error. It should have been Bill 202.* I'd just ask that the record be corrected.

MR. SAPERS: On that clarification. Now I'm confused, Mr. Speaker, for two reasons. First of all, I didn't hear the Deputy Government House Leader mention any private member's Bill, whether it be 202 or 209, but also I'm wondering why the Deputy Government House Leader would be talking about a private member's Bill under Projected Government Business.

THE SPEAKER: Well, that's a valid question. Perhaps this was just a desire on behalf of the Deputy Government House Leader to provide more information than was actually required from his position to provide at this point in time. Do you want to clarify?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, in terms of items which we anticipate might come forward for Royal Assent on Thursday, that was one of the Bills that was included.

THE SPEAKER: So it was an amplification, providing more information than was really required, which is a good thing on a Thursday afternoon.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Second Reading**
Bill 14
Appropriation Act, 1997

THE SPEAKER: I believe that at this point in time we haven't had a moving, an introduction of Bill 14. [interjection] We've had an introduction. All right.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, this debate has begun then.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to see that there's no one who wants to stand up at this point in time and defend this particular Bill. Of course we have lots of concerns about every appropriation Bill that comes before this House, particularly when they're seeking the legislative authority for billions of dollars. I think there are a great many processes that

*See page 711, left col., para. 10, line 3

need to be reviewed here. I think it's important, particularly for the new members in this House, to think about these things before we go to the final vote on this.

There are a few themes in this Bill, three in fact that I see.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Point of Order
Motion for Second Reading**

MR. SAPERS: Official Opposition. I wish. Well, not on that. Mr. Speaker, I may have to clarify that remark at some other point.

I'm reviewing Votes and Proceedings for Wednesday, May 21, and I note that on the 21st, under Introduction of Bills last evening Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, was given first reading. I don't believe that Bill 14 has been moved for second reading, so this item of business is out of order.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. Opposition House Leader, the Chair indicated that a couple of minutes ago, that it had not been moved yet.

Debate Continued

THE SPEAKER: Deputy Government House Leader, is somebody prepared to move second reading of Bill 14?

MRS. BLACK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I'd be pleased to move second reading of Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 1997.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I started to say, 11 and a half billion dollars and no one on the government side wants to speak to it.

Well, there are three themes, I think, in this particular Appropriation Bill. One of them is the lack of disclosure that we see here within the supply votes. One of them clearly is the human deficit, the lack of time and energy and thought spent on people in this province, and one is the lack of accountability and performance.

Dealing with the first theme, lack of disclosure within the supply votes. We have always on this side of the House supported the move to separate operating expenditures and capital investment when we're talking about the budget. I think it's very important. Certainly, in previous years the full expensing of capital expenditures within the GRF has made it difficult to measure the true costs of providing programs and services. This time around we found it even more difficult with the compressed time frame that we had to deal with these estimates and the number of meetings that were ongoing at the same time in this House, making it difficult for members to fully represent their constituents in every area, simply because we couldn't be in three places at once.

The Auditor General and the Alberta Financial Review Commission have recommended the separation of operating and capital expenditures in the way the government reports here as a means of strengthening manager accountability and evaluating the effectiveness of all programs. We concur with that. Instead, this government has used the recommendation as a means to reduce the level of disclosure on a program-by-program basis within the Appropriation Act. So that means, then, that you have to waste

a lot of time asking questions on the level of detail that should be and in fact was previously provided.

Before this Deficit Elimination Act was passed in May of '93, the practice in appropriating supply was to include a program-by-program breakdown under each supply vote. So not only did this give us an assurance that the proper amount of money was being allocated to each program within the department, but it was very easy to compare year to year, program by program, line by line where the money was being spent and where the increases and decreases were. Every year since I have been in this House, the way and manner of presentation, how these things have been presented in the Assembly, has changed. So every time we ask for information on this, Mr. Speaker, we have to wait for a lot of the information to come after these Bills have been passed. That does not meet the needs. [interjection] I see that the hon. minister on the other side wants to enter the debate. Too bad he didn't stand up at the appropriate time. But don't worry; in about 20 minutes you'll have a chance to speak too.

3:00

When we see the Deficit Elimination Act in section 7, under the guise of streamlining the budget process, we have actually seen a compacting of it, which makes it very difficult, very hard for people to actually see line by line where the dollars and cents in this government go. That's a disservice to everybody, and I think it's something that needs to be addressed and corrected in this Legislative Assembly. When we see just global figures being provided in each department under interim supply without a breakdown by program, I think that the government clearly shows its lack of concern for accountability and fiscal responsibility, and in fact shows a level of arrogance in the way it provides the services to these people and a level of arrogance in their regard for what they think the taxpayer of this province needs to know. Mr. Speaker, clearly that is a disservice to everyone here.

When we talk about the lack of accountability and performance in these budgets, I think that there's a great deal to discuss, Mr. Speaker. Certainly in this session, in May we heard the Treasurer suggest that Alberta is breaking new ground in Canada when it comes to performance measures and accountability. We're making some strides. There's no doubt about that. But performance measurement is an ongoing, evolving process which needs to be adapted and changed as the requirements change and as, in fact, the strategies change and the dollars and cents allocations change. This hasn't been happening here.

This government, I think, has taken a page out of the New Zealand budgetary process when they first started this whole process. Well, if that's where they got their information, then I would suggest that they go back there and keep up with the ongoing involvement of that process so that we see an increase in terms of the accountability and performance measures here, keeping abreast of the kinds of changes that we see in the information being presented before us.

As an Alberta Liberal caucus here and as an opposition party in the House we made a number of constructive suggestions for improving Bill 40, which was the Government Accountability Act, when it was presented back in 1995. Of course, because of the way this government operates, they didn't accept any of the constructive amendments that would have improved the accountability framework in this province. In fact, that's contrary to what they're telling the people of the province they are doing.

When we are talking about being progressive and constructive and being an effective opposition, we bring forward the best ideas that we can put together and that we get from outside, from the

people of the province, and present them to the government. Sometimes they do take them, Mr. Speaker. It takes years and years. Freedom of information was originally our idea. With the changes that have happened in health care, we've progressed along that route to present a number of very good ideas to the government, which we expect at some point in time they will undertake.

But in terms of this budgetary process and in terms of this Appropriation Bill, the government has been absolutely unable or unwilling to take any of the constructive suggestions that we have had. We hope that over the summer break they will reconsider this.

DR. WEST: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Point of order, hon. Minister of Energy?

Point of Order Relevance

DR. WEST: Yes. Citing *Beauchesne* under relevance. I've been listening to the debate on Bill 14 here for the last few minutes, and I can't find a reference to the content or to any detail of the Appropriation Act. It's a random philosophical vent, and I wonder if it fits in debate on second reading of Bill 14.

MS CARLSON: I think when we speak to the principle of a Bill that talks about spending 11 and a half billion dollars in this province, when we speak about accountability and performance measures of this government, it is more than relevant, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in second reading a wide range, wide latitude is given to the total principle of the Bill.

Please proceed, hon. member.

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much.

DR. WEST: Thanks for that clarification, Mr. Speaker.

MS CARLSON: He'll get his chance to speak, Mr. Speaker. You know, the more you keep doing this, the longer this speech will go. So if I were you, I'd get a cup of coffee and relax.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: The Government Accountability Act pertains specifically to how the government spends money and how they present it and the kind of discussion and debate we have about it in the House. Certainly we made some recommendations that even at this late date could be undertaken, Mr. Speaker, in terms of this Bill. I would like to speak to them for a moment.

When we talked about changes to the financial statements to include items such as statements of cash flow and statements of commitments and asset and liability balance sheets for ministries and statements of consulting costs, these are very basic, rudimentary pieces of a puzzle that really form a whole picture of the strategic, long-term planning that anybody would have when they're talking about dollars and cents. So whether you're talking about your long-term plans in your own home, your long-term plans and how you spend the daily amounts in your business, or the long-term plans and the daily amounts that you spend in a government, they're all relevant and should certainly have been taken under consideration by this government, not just the little

benchmarks that they did take that then they really can't compare because they keep changing them year after year and because they don't have a lot of relevance in terms of where they're going. So I think that clearly the government should consider that.

We talked about statements of commitments of the Crown as of the day on which the financial statements in the consolidated fiscal plan are finalized. This is also clearly very important: what the Crown commits to. Having this information ready on the day that we vote on this Bill is extremely important. To ask us to vote on 11 and a half billion dollars before we have the information ready and available to us, in fact some few months before we will have all of the information that is really necessary for us to make a clear and correct judgment on it, is an abomination. It's certainly something that the government should be addressing, should have addressed a long time ago.

We talked then also about a statement of specific financial risks to the Crown as of the day on which the forecasted financial statements in the consolidated fiscal plan are finalized. The fiscal risks in relation to the government decisions and other circumstances have a material effect on the fiscal and economic outlook, and I think that this is a very important thing to take a look at. Clearly, anything that has a material effect on how you spend 11 and a half billion dollars should be put forward, should be completely analyzed, should be debated not only on both sides of this House but out in the province. Certainly this hasn't happened here.

There are many more recommendations that we made, and I would ask the Provincial Treasurer to go back and take a look at them and reflect upon them, because they were also discussed not just by us – if they don't want to believe us, that's fine – but also by the Auditor General, for whom both parties have a high regard. He talked about them in his '95-96 report on improving the accountability framework within ministerial annual reports. They're very important things to discuss. Things like descriptions of the programs offered by the ministry, the preparation of a consolidated 10-year fiscal strategy report, legislation which reviews the consolidated annual reports in the ministries: all of these things are things which industry has provided forever to their stakeholders and shareholders. It only makes good common sense that the government would present the same kind information for scrutiny in here.

For whatever reasons they don't want to do it are certainly beyond our ability to know and understand, but I'm hoping that the Treasurer will talk to us about that and explain why it is that they have made no moves in that direction. It makes us wonder, then, how they really can be serious about effectiveness and efficiency and how they can be serious about really measuring outcomes in the reporting process that they have. So I'm hoping that these issues will be discussed at second reading of this Bill, before we get into committee on it. If not, then I'm sure that all members on this side are going to have a great deal more to say about this, because 11 and half billion dollars is a huge sum of money, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

The third theme really talks about the human deficit, which we really see as a legacy that's going to be left by this government. The government previous to 1993 left a legacy of dollars and cents debt; this government will leave a legacy of human debt. It's something that's very important to talk about, because taking care of people, putting a human face on what's happening in this province, particularly low-income earners and people who don't have the same opportunities as many of the people on this side of

the House, as many of their friends, and as many of their families, have been neglected in this budget. In fact they aren't mentioned; they aren't addressed. Their areas of concern are glossed over. It simply is a budget that doesn't include people.

When you're talking about the responsibility of a government, that should be their primary responsibility: the people who make up the fabric and the framework of this province. It's a budget that, as I see it, doesn't invest in the potential of people either. I think that that's something that the Provincial Treasurer should remember. He is a servant of the people; it is not the people who are his servant.

I think that once the smoke clears and the dust settles from the legacy of this government, they'll be known throughout North America, not just throughout this country, for the kind of structural human deficit that we have here. We have an imbalance between the core programs and services that the people in this province deserve and in fact need. This has all been created by the kind of ad hoc slashing and burning and the lack of an overall long-term strategic plan that this government has embarked on. I believe they've embarked on a strategy to be re-elected in the very short term; they haven't embarked on a strategy which will enhance the viability of this province for the next 10 and 15 and 20 and 50 years to come.

How you develop that long-term strategy that really works for people is by focusing on education and on health care and on providing a social safety net for the people who need it in this province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would remind the members on the opposite side that many of the people they know are only a paycheque or two away from living in poverty and from desperately needing that social safety net that is required to provide the kind of standard of living that we've known and been accustomed to in this province. I remember many times over the past years how the Speaker himself has stood up and waxed eloquent in this House about the spirit of the people here and the nature of the kind of people and the kind of future we have to look forward to and how we're all proud of being Albertans.

Well, that's not the case for many people in this province anymore, Mr. Speaker. Many people can't look beyond the end of the day because they don't have food on their tables. They don't have access to health care services when they need it. They don't have adequate housing. They don't have the crayons, that were talked about in this House yesterday, for their children to go to school with. All of these things are things that impact the daily fabric of our society, the daily fabric of the people of this province, and will continue to impact them for many years to come. It's been something that has been specifically neglected by this government. They gloss over it in the nice statements they make about where we're going and the Alberta advantage, but the Alberta advantage, Mr. Speaker, is for a very select few people in this province. It isn't for the average person. It isn't for anyone who's in need in this province right now, and I think that's something that we clearly need to address. With a budget of 11 and a half billion dollars and the kind of surplus this government has, it certainly could have been addressed.

Yes, the money has been legislated, and any surplus is to go to pay down the debt. But there were many opportunities in this past year for this government to bring in interim budgets to adjust to the reality of their financial situation when they saw oil and gas revenues rising like they were and knew the kind of projected surpluses they were going to have. In a very responsible fashion two or three times in the past 12 months they could have brought in interim adjustments. Certainly everyone in the corporate world

does this, from the smallest business to the largest business. They couldn't operate and they wouldn't be responsible if they didn't do that.

There is no doubt that any kind of treasurer or CEO in a large corporation who brought in expenses in a year that were 10 or 20 or 30 percent below what they had forecasted would have their management abilities seriously scrutinized by a board of directors, because that would in fact be incompetent managing. Yet when the government does it in this province, it's lauded by themselves as being the most responsible thing that could happen. Well, it isn't, Mr. Speaker. What is responsible is to know clearly what your revenues are going to be, to know clearly what your expenses are going to be, and to adjust accordingly as soon as the information becomes available to you. That is done all the time on the outside. It is certainly expected of those agencies that report to the government and those departments that report to the government. Clearly, if the Minister of Education had his department reporting 20 or 30 or 40 percent below what they had budgeted for the year, he would have some serious questions of management. He would have some serious questions about the delivery of services over that past 12 months.

When the government does it, they say that it's a great thing to have done. We say that it's an irresponsible thing to have done, that it is not how they should be spending the dollars, that if they had brought in interim budgets, we would have had money to address the kinds of problems we're seeing in this province in education and in health care. In fact, we could have looked beyond those huge problems to some of the other issues that are starting to rear their heads in this province: infrastructure issues, road issues for northern Alberta, environmental issues that are ongoing, health studies that are required with the kinds of changes that we're seeing in industrial development in this province and when we're looking at clean air strategies over the long term.

There's a lot of investigative work that needs to be done in many areas in this province that isn't being done. This government says that research and development is an area where we need to look forward to the future. Well, someone has to provide the dollars for research and development, Mr. Speaker, or the incentives for companies to invest. This is the kind of direction that the government could have been taking instead of saving all of that money, saving all of that surplus until just before they were ready to call an election and then disbursing the goodies out there in the community. That isn't a responsible way to manage, and with the number of members they have on that side of the House, they certainly have the resources to be responsible in terms of how they manage. These are the kinds of questions that we think should be addressed and the kind of direction that the government should be looking at, and it's very important for all the new members in this House to see this and to question their front bench on their performance.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise and say a few words about Bill 14, the Appropriation Act. I've watched with interest the budget process of this government and essentially of this province. When the Provincial Treasurer delivered his budget, there were two themes, two symbols. One was the loonie on his lapel. I think perhaps we should have a penny on our lapel, because if we look after a penny, the dollars will look after themselves.

The business of this province is the business of being in

business. The business boondoggles continue to haunt us in this province. We have the loonies on the lapel, but we're losing more and more money in our industrial strategies: our industrial strategies in Millar Western, in the pulp industry. Of course, in the recent past we had NovAtel, and we had MagCan down in High River. We had many industrial strategies that have not been to the best economic advantage of the taxpayer. The taxpayer paid the bills, and now as we continue, we seem to develop further from Millar Western. We get into oil separators. We're sponsoring all these businesses. Really, people tell us that they're getting out of the business of being in business, and I'm quite skeptical of this, Mr. Speaker. As I sit over here in this corner, I'm skeptical of the slogan: getting out of the business of being in business.

3:20

We calculate that taxpayers have lost nearly \$750 million in loans, guarantees, and investments during the 580 days of the government that Mr. Klein has been leading. That's \$473,000 a day, Mr. Speaker. That is a lot of money. The \$473,000 could fund 778 kindergarten spaces per day, provide eye examinations for 11,800 Albertans, provide 160,000 hot lunches to needy Alberta children. It could provide 31,000 home care visits per day and keep 5,565 long-term care beds. It could employ 4,113 registered nurses today – I should say 4,112, because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is employed in this House, and we're very grateful for her accurate observations on that which she talks about.

MR. DAY: What number are you referring to?

MR. MacDONALD: There are 4,113 registered nurses we could employ, but I corrected that and said that now there are 4,112 because Mrs. Sloan is now employed in this House.

The government has said that they want to get out of the Prince Rupert grain terminals and Al-Pac and all other direct loans, loan guarantees, and investments. The government has to come clean with Albertans on these deals. We can't have secret side deals behind closed doors. Albertans must know the extent and terms and conditions of the government's involvement.

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

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we have a point of order here from the Provincial Treasurer.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's one thing to wander and ramble through the budgetary process, but the member opposite is talking about secret deals, which are as secret as the recordings I have right in front of me going back to 1981, which I table daily and which have been tabled in this House. For instance, he talked about Ridley and the Prince Rupert situation. That's 1981; that's 16 years ago. They are all duly recorded public accounts tabled here in the Legislature, mailed out to the public. Yet he is saying: secret deals. He's also saying: loan and loan guarantees which the government promised to get out of. The government is out of that business and has been since 1993.

So I would ask the member if he would have the politeness to drop that reference and possibly even apologize for it. There is nothing secret about these deals. They are painfully recorded,

some as far back as 16 years ago, in great detail. I don't want to take the time of the House to read in fact the detail in the heritage savings trust fund on these arrangements, which were pre-93 and are not secret. He has violated Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j), and I think he should apologize.

MR. MacDONALD: I am referring to budget documents. These documents refer certainly to these items. I myself am a taxpayer, and on behalf of the taxpayers that I represent in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency, I do not feel that I have to say anything more regarding the financial record of this government.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, does that, then, conclude your discussion on the point of order?

MR. MacDONALD: As far as I'm concerned, yes.

THE SPEAKER: Okay.

We're in second reading. Second reading is a provision, an opportunity for all members. We had a motion on this Bill this afternoon on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer by the Deputy Government House Leader. The Chair recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to speak on it. Tradition is that the Chair would then allow a member of the opposite side of the House to speak on it. No other member rose at that point in time. A member of the government side could have risen after that, could have adjourned the debate, and we could have moved on. No hon. government member did. The Chair saw movement from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He rose; he was recognized.

During debate at second reading there's always very, very wide latitude used. There are some words that may be appropriate to some members and may be inappropriate to other members. In the context of the word "secret," in terms of the way I heard the exchange, I didn't see anything that would unnerve anyone. However, others have the right to say that, hon. member. I would just advise everybody and all to be cautious in their approach. The hon. member has 20 minutes for his discussion. Any member of the government side can stand then and be recognized by the Chair after that to participate in the debate. If not, then we'll hear it as long as this goes this afternoon, till this is adjourned.

Please proceed.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, I'm skeptical of the accountability process. But there's also the openness of this government that I would like to talk about and also about the human deficit that we have had.

First off, I would like to say that I admire fiscal responsibility. In the past, fiscal responsibility has been second fiddle in the policies of this government. You have spent money, pardon me, like roughnecks during spring breakup, and you have almost ruined a good financial province.

We are blessed with many, many resources. I notice in this budget oil revenues, projections for oil and gas, and they are low projections. But fortunately, the market price now is quite strong. I certainly hope for the people of this province that it continues. I admire the fact that we have money salted away for a rainy day. I certainly hope this continues. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about earlier, the political agenda of worrying about what the next election is going to bring is not good enough.

I think we should worry about what the next 30, 40, 50 years is going to bring this province. We've got to get past this idea of looking at a problem and finding a solution that is going to get us re-elected. We must look at the long term, and in the budget we must look at the long term for transportation, for energy development. We know our conventional oil is running out, and we must increase our production of synthetic crude oil. Conventional fields in this province are drying up, and it is a sound idea that you have of economic incentives to develop the northern tar sands. You see, we're not all that bad on this side of this house.

The human deficit. We look at the cuts in the budget that were made particularly in health care and particularly with seniors. Now, I know that people can say that in other provinces seniors are not as well off as they are in this province. Under certain situations perhaps it is true, but there are many females past retirement age in this province who have fallen through the cracks of all the government programs that have been put in place. They have through no fault of their own a very limited income. That issue is not addressed in this Bill.

3:30

MRS. McCLELLAN: Federal pensions.

MR. MacDONALD: I'm not talking about federal pensions. I am talking about the issue of disposable income for senior citizens of this province. Perhaps their spouse has died, and they are living alone. It's not addressed anywhere in this Bill.

Now, the human deficit also in health care. It is almost a trust of a government to provide accessible, affordable health care, and with your budget proposals this is not being done.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks on Bill 14. Thank you very much for your time.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In speaking to Bill 14, I'd like to address, if I could, the business plans and in particular the scheme that underlines all of the business plans for all of the departments, and that is the adoption of a key performance measures model for determining what will be undertaken in departments and eventually matching those key performance measures with some sort of dollar figure; hence the compilation of the budget and Bill 14 that we have before us now.

There's a growing body of literature that is very critical of using key performance measures, particularly in adopting such a system across all forms of human endeavour. It's a good system, and we've seen it applied, I think, in the budget appropriately in departments like transportation. I think if you look through some of the key performance objectives for the Department of Justice, there are places where the use of key performance measures makes sense and will actually result in information being gathered about services that the government is going to provide that is useful in determining how money should be spent and is useful in determining future courses of action.

I think in particular I'd like to focus on education, where there is, as I indicated, a growing body of literature and a growing concern about the use of key performance measures. This weekend there'll be a conference held in this city where a speaker on the topic, Berliner, who has a book out on myths propagated about public education, will be here and talk about some of the innovations. One of the things that his book discusses and which I assume he'll be talking about this weekend is key performance measures. In education he indicates that key performance

measures amongst teachers have resulted in what he calls the three A's – anxiety, anger, and alienation – that when someone outside of an endeavour, someone in a central office here or in a central office in a school district, starts to outline the key performance measures that are going to be imposed on others, instead of increased efficiency, instead of attaining the kinds of goals that the people who originate those objectives would like to have achieved, the act of having an outsider determine what those are going to be results in the very opposite happening in classrooms.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

I asked in the estimates of advanced education and I asked in the estimates of Education, I believe, if there had been any study by those particular departments in terms of key performance measures, key performance indicators, if there had been any study done on the model, if there were evaluation plans in place to evaluate them. I know in the case of advanced education that if you visit institutions across the province, there is resentment in terms of the time that staff and institute instructors and faculty members have to spend preparing those measures and the kinds of resources that it's felt they're taking away from the main obligation of those institutions, which is to provide instruction and learning opportunities for students. So I've asked if there is an evaluation plan.

I know that key performance measures are greatly favoured by managers. They have their roots, their origin, in the factory models that were produced earlier in this century in Chicago, some of the early work in a business school there. They have been questioned, and I think a government that has bought them so wholeheartedly and relies on them so wholeheartedly for every aspect of their business plans and their budgeting has an obligation to look at them, to second-think them, and to make sure that they are doing what was intended.

If I can move, then, from those key performance measures in general to the specific ones in terms of the Education budget. I look at the goals in the business plan of the Education budget and wonder, again, about the appropriateness of the performance measures and where they came from. Who were the people that were responsible for generating them? If you're going to go down the road of key performance measures, then I think there's an obligation to make sure that what is included in those measures is really what is important and will get at what departments would like to have happen in the province.

I look at the Education plan. In particular, "teaching in Alberta consistently is of high quality" is a goal that the plan has, and it's backed up by some dollars in this budget. There's a focus on "updated teacher preparation, certification and evaluation requirements." I think that that's a good goal to have. When that updating is being done, I hope that we'll draw on experiences elsewhere. There's a study from Texas that looked at 900 school districts and 2.4 million students and looked at what made a difference. If you're going to go down the road of looking at achievement scores, as we do in education, and having key performance measures for achievement scores, then the factors that affect those achievement scores, I think, are important to look at. The Texas study, I think, is informative for us because it indicates that if you want them to increase, if you want to make student achievement scores rise, if you want them to improve, then the greatest factor is that you do that work through teachers and improving teacher quality.

Their study, which was extensive, led to some rather interesting

conclusions. It indicated that there was a direct correlation between better educated teachers, teachers with a master's degree, and the performance of students on achievement tests. It looked at the experience of teachers, and again there was a direct correlation between the amount of experience that teachers had and, again, students' scores on achievement tests. There was a correlation between socioeconomic areas and the kinds of teachers that teach in various communities, again a good indication that better qualified teachers are drawn to communities where the socioeconomic are better in terms of the quality of life, the jobs, the income of the community.

3:40

So I hope that this rather general statement about teacher preparation and certification and evaluation requirements goes deeper and looks at the whole notion of teacher quality and the effect of that teacher quality on achievement test scores, because again, if we're going to use the key performance measures of Education as being student performance on achievement tests and tie money to that, then I think that's important.

The Texas study was interesting because it also looked at class size. Over the years class size has been bandied around and accepted and rejected as being an indicator of performance. They come out definitively with a threshold of 18 students and indicate that once the class size in grades 1 to 7 moves over 18 students, there is a direct drop-off in student performance on achievement scores. That's rather interesting, because they also indicate that class sizes lower than 18 don't seem to make that much difference.

In terms of the budget, where goal 6 of the business plan is talking about the education funding as fair and equitable and point 6.26 of that plan is "to increase the proportion of funding used for instruction," I hope that information about class sizes is factored into decisions that are made in terms of increasing that funding. It would seem to be a rather natural conclusion, if you were to believe the information from south of the border, that in at least grades 1 to 7 class sizes of 18 should be the goal, not to talk in terms of teacher/pupil ratios across the district, which often include certified people who are not in classrooms, but to actually look at individual classrooms and try to ensure that the numbers in them don't exceed the 18 that's being indicated here. Interestingly enough – and I still find it a little difficult to believe – they indicate that at the high school level class size doesn't seem to have as much of a direct influence on achievement as they found at least in grades 1 to 7.

In terms of the budget and the money that's going into the funding for instruction, again, in estimates I asked for the rationale, the breakdown of the basic per pupil grant, how it was arrived at by the department, and I assume that that information will be forthcoming.

Class size is important, and the money that they spend is important. The Ferguson study in Texas indicated that teacher quality and class size directly affect achievement. The third thing that they indicated was that money influences achievement. Again, it's how you spend that money that's important and making sure that teachers are well paid. They indicated that any scheme that would see each school district get the same amount of money doesn't seem to make logical sense, that districts are different and have different needs, that there has to be some accommodation, some scheme, some plans for attracting good teachers to communities in low socioeconomic areas, that money is important, that how it's spent and evening out dollars per student across the province may achieve one kind of fiscal equity.

In terms of the equity that's important – that is, equity in terms of students being able to perform, able to achieve – it's something quite different and has to be looked at less superficially than I think the kinds of performance objectives that we see listed in these business plans indicate.

Mr. Speaker, it's a lot of money, 11 billion plus dollars, that we're looking at. The government-adopted scheme for spending and disbursing those funds in the business plans I think is one way of going at it. I would hope that there are other schemes being looked at, that, as I said previously, this particular way of managing the budget is evaluated continuously, and that particularly in education alternate models of achieving similar kinds of goals are explored.

Thank you very much.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would now move that we adjourn debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that debate on Bill 14 be adjourned. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

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

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 8
Historical Resources Amendment Act, 1997

THE CHAIRMAN: We have an amendment, as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, that Bill 8 be amended in section 3 by striking out clause (a).

On the amendment, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, on the amendment. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. We had an opportunity to simply present the amendment the other night. I know that the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose had a chance to review the amendment and, I believe, share it with the minister. I hope that by now the government caucus has had a chance to review the amendment and the intent of the amendment.

I would like to simply put on the record that our objective with this amendment is to sort of raise the bar in terms of public awareness or the degree to which the public will be aware of the government's action and be able to better hold the government accountable for decisions made. Often things that are done by government are just seen as sort of a monolithic action. I find that in my constituency and when I talk to Albertans throughout the province, there's not always a degree of awareness about the difference between a ministerial order and a Lieutenant Governor order in council and in fact a debate in the Legislature, whether that debate be about a Bill or a motion or a private member's Bill.

You've heard many members, Mr. Chairman, of the Official Opposition talk about the evils of doing business by order in council and how we would like to see regulations referred routinely to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations and how we'd like to see the process be more open and that those things in legislation that really should be part and parcel of the Bill should be presented in Bill format and not simply left to regulations. We've made all those arguments, and I stand by all of those arguments.

3:50

In this particular case we think this is an appropriate area of administrative regulation that can be dealt with by the Lieutenant Governor in Council or by cabinet. We didn't feel as confident that it should be left to a ministerial order. That in a nutshell is why we're asking that the section of the Bill known as section 3(a) be deleted, effectively restoring the original wording of the Bill that would read:

The Minister may use the Fund for the following purposes:

- (a) to fund programs designated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council for the protection, enhancement, promotion or display of Alberta's historic resources.

So I hope that amendment will be quickly dealt with, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment does not change the heart of Bill 8, which of course was to make it possible for nonprofit support groups to collect admission fees at historical sites. It does, however, address the use of moneys from the historic resources fund. The amendment simply eliminates a proposed change which would allow the minister to fund programs directly. In terms of the Act, the amendment maintains the status quo, meaning that funds for programs are to be designated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council before ministerial approval.

Mr. Chairman, I am prepared as the mover of this motion to leave section 10.2(2) as it presently reads, and therefore I wish to speak in favour of the amendment. If it's in order, I wish to call the question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the Bill.

MRS. SLOAN: On the Bill. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would again like to take this opportunity to make some comments with respect to Bill 8 in its entirety. I think that speaking on reviewing the Bill in a general sense, the concerns of the opposition caucus have been related as to why this Bill is coming forward right now. While there may have been discussions about the Bill in the context of other committees or discussions, it is not clear to us at this point in time why the Bill is necessary and who has asked that these changes be undertaken. There have been no tablings in the House to my knowledge with respect to the meaning of this Bill or the rationale for it. It would be helpful if the hon. member sponsoring the Bill has copies of those that can provide additional rationale on the Bill itself and why at this particular time in this particular session it has been necessitated to come forward.

I believe that the opposition caucus also has spoken to concerns with respect to the minister already having powers to delegate, which are appointed under section 3 of the Act. It seems, then, the only reason to repeal this section would be to end the prohibition on the minister from delegating powers and duties.

Looking at I guess the ramifications that relate to the minister's right to describe the regulations regarding the naming, management, and handling of historical resources, a question that remains outstanding for us is whether or not it is the minister's intention to delegate these responsibilities to the friends-of groups.

The amendment just passed certainly from my perspective has improved the Bill, specifically with respect to the ability for programs funded through historical resources to continue to be passed through the Lieutenant Governor in Council. This, from my perspective, will allow the public to maintain a degree of scrutiny, to be aware of changes, and to offer advice with respect to those to the minister.

The other aspects of the Bill that continue to concern the opposition caucus relate to the plans for the historic resources fund itself. With the introduction of this Bill and the introduction of an increased role for the friends-of groups, it gives rise to questions on this side of the House as to exactly what is planned. It is not my recollection – but I may be corrected – that we have had a tabling with respect to an annual report from this fund in this session. Had that been the case, perhaps some of these questions could have been answered. What has been undertaken? What has been completed? What projects are still outstanding? With respect to current revenue, what are the plans for the future? Those types of things, Mr. Chairman, are not before us, and it is a matter that leaves doubts in our minds as to what is proposed for these funds.

We also continue to have concerns that there is the potential for matching grants to historical sites to be ended by this Bill. That again is a matter that has not been clarified. There have not been tablings. There have not been discussions with respect to this item previously. Obviously, that's of concern to I think every constituency in the province, to a variety of sectors. Many of our historical sites have been constructed and undertaken in this province by achieving matching grants. Will that continue to be the case? Will that provision still be offered to those that have an interest in securing and maintaining historical sites in our province? If it is not the case, then the ramifications of the Bill are even greater. In fact our historical sites, sites that tie us to the past and assist us in understanding and appreciating the past and learning from it, have the potential to be jeopardized. I do not think that's a matter that any member of either side of the House would like to contemplate or to support.

It is of interest to me that this is coming forward: the whole suggestion of reforming, amending, the historical aspect of legislation, particularly in the context of the last three to four years, in the context of many changes being made to government departments, which has eliminated a tremendous amount of history with respect to how we have done business, what we have learned from that, and, hand in hand with that, not only the loss in terms of a historical material sense but also with respect to the history that is achieved and garnered and held by employees. I think much can be said for learning from the past.

As I have inferred previously, part of that has to do with being able to not only geographically visit sites that have historical significance but being able as well to have museums, archives, historical publications maintained in such a way that they are accessible and preserved for future generations. Many of these

proposed changes in this specific Bill raise questions and doubts as to whether or not that commitment to maintain our historical resources will continue to be the case.

4:00

The Historical Resources Amendment Act in its entirety has still many unanswered questions. I raise in relation to not only this Bill but others that unfortunately it continues to be the process that other than verbal statements made with respect to the amendments proposed, all members of the Assembly do not receive complete rationale in written form prior to the process of debate in the Assembly. With all due respect to the Government House Leader, from my perspective as a member who appreciates the opportunity to constructively debate amendments, I think that provision would entitle and support a more informed level of debate in this Assembly. It has not been the case with this Bill or in this session. It still leaves the members of the opposition with significant questions, and I think we would perhaps be in a position to give unanimous support if many of the questions were answered before debate was actually undertaken.

I have covered the sections of the Bill that continue to concern me, Mr. Chairman, and with that I conclude my remarks on Bill 8. Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much. I have a few comments on Bill 8, concerns mostly. I'm concerned that the friends-of organizations are not at this point in time prepared to be the managers, not that they couldn't or wouldn't do a good job, but in fact they don't have the technical knowledge and know-how in many instances or the time or the resources within themselves to actually accommodate and facilitate that process. I'm wondering, then, what the big hurry is to pass this Bill. When we rush through a process like this, we don't have any of the people who are involved in the friends-of associations now prepared and ready to become managers. Most of them participate in these processes on a very part-time basis, enjoy the activities that they're involved in but don't need or want the additional responsibility that will come with managing organizations like this.

This draws me to some of the comments that were made by the Minister of Health the other night. He talked about the Bill allowing for a greater efficiency in the day-to-day financial operations of the facilities by simplifying the accounting. There's no indication here that having friends-of who don't have the technical background or expertise now managing these organizations will simplify anything or increase the efficiency. In fact, it may do quite the opposite. They don't have the technical expertise to do this. [interjections]

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I wonder if you could adjourn the discussion to one of the lounges. [interjection] The whole lot or whatever. You're drowning out the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and we are wanting to follow her reasoning in this debate. So if you could abide by that in whichever way.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: You should make them stay later. I think that would be a good penalty.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: In speaking to the potential for greater efficiency in operating these sites, that may happen, but I'm concerned that with the speed that this Bill is proceeding, in fact it will create exactly the opposite problem. These friends-of will have to look for technical expertise that they are probably going to have to pay for, which will increase the operating costs and which will lower efficiency and won't do anything in terms of simplifying the accounting.

When you're talking about simplifying the accounting, there is a potential risk there. There's a real downside to doing that. You can simplify the organization and operation to the point where you don't have the proper accounting processes in place or reporting back, and in fact we've already seen that. The Minister of Community Development tabled some information the other day. The information was financial statements on a couple of friends-of organizations, and they were financial statements that had been reviewed and reviewed internally. That is quite opposite to what is mandated. [interjection] Sorry?

MRS. McCLELLAN: You'd better check that out.

MS CARLSON: They were not reviewed? They were in fact audited?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Yes.

MS CARLSON: Okay. I thank the minister for that clarification. I think it's very important. Those are the kinds of things that we need to be watching out for. When you start talking about simplifying the process and start talking about putting the operations in hands of people who are not trained managers, you run the risk of these kinds of things happening. So I'm very happy to see that the minister has pointed out that in those particular instances that in fact was not the case. I'm wondering if she could answer the question of what safeguards she has in place so that in this transition period and in the time period thereafter there will be sufficient checks and balances in the system to ensure that those kinds of things never have the potential for happening. [interjection] Yes, but who's reviewing the contracts?

Chairman's Ruling Questioning a Member

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. If you want to ask a question of the hon. minister and the minister seems inclined to reply, then let's do it in the parliamentary form, which is that you could sit down, the minister would stand up and answer the question, and then we would recognize you again, Edmonton-Ellerslie. Otherwise, ignore her answers until she properly puts them.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The answers have been valuable, so I do appreciate them.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: One additional point. The Minister of Health talked about the amendment allowing decisions to be made at the site between the government facility manager and the friends-of to accommodate visitors. The implication there is that somebody from the friends-of society is going to be there on a full-time basis and on a regular and consistent basis, in fact an executive director

or some sort of an operations manager. I don't see anywhere where that is specifically addressed in the Bill in terms of how that person will be accommodated. If there's provisions for remuneration, then who currently holds those positions so we can make the comparison on a before and after case?

Mr. Chairman, if those questions are answered for me, then I would be interested in supporting the Bill.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have a point of order. The hon. Minister of Health on a point of order.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I just happened to be listening to the debate, which I try to do fairly regularly. I wonder if the hon. member would clarify her reference to the Minister of Health. Perhaps I was not listening carefully enough, but I was concerned about the reference to the Minister of Health, and I was just wondering what claim or allegation is being made against that person.

MS CARLSON: It was clarification actually, Mr. Chairman. No allegations, certainly. I was referring to your comments on Bill 8 on May 20 in *Hansard* on page 650. You were just talking about greater efficiency in the day-to-day financial operations. I wanted some clarification on that. Then you talked about decisions being made on site by the friends-of people, and I'm wondering, then, if there's a requirement for them to have some full-time person who's there on a day-to-day basis so that there's some chronology and history of events that are happening so they have the expertise and ability to make those decisions. They were simply points of clarification on my part that I'm sure the minister will address. Thanks.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I too am sure that the minister will address those concerns adequately, but I would appreciate the hon. member perhaps conveying to me what her actual reference point or the actual transcript is with respect to me making those remarks, because I'm having difficulty finding the context for them, but that could happen at another time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Hopefully we've clarified that for now, and I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to continue with her clause-by-clause examination of Bill 8.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Mr. Chairman, I'm actually finished with those comments. The comments that I was referring to were from the May 20 *Hansard*. So that concludes my remarks.

[The clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

4:10

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 2

Special Waste Management Corporation Act Repeal Act

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking on this Bill, Bill 2, the background of Swan Hills makes an awful lot of sense, but what we've come to is the relationship of why it was incorporated in 1982 and all the items ensuring, where practical, that a special waste management facility was established and operated. The main thing with this, my concern in repealing it, is that after we've given \$150 million to this project, then how can we justify on December 31, 1998, possibly taking it back as taxpayers?

There was a committee that was terminated at the end of January, and it doesn't appear that this committee has been put back in place. Why hasn't it? It still is a matter that we have to look at. It was in fact something that was very poorly built. The environment up there, what was brought forward a couple of weeks ago by Health – we've been addressing this to the environment minister over the last five weeks, and then Health came in the last two weeks saying that there is a problem. Last night I was told of a study on the environment up there last year. After the study was done through this lab, the lab was actually shut down for three weeks to decontaminate it.

Now, we keep bringing this factor forward about the environment and how it's going to be affected. The waterways – that is, downstream – and every trapper from here to Inuvik for the next hundred years, if this is not taken care of very soon, are going to be affected: the rodents, the fish, the beaver, everything there.

We feel that to repeal this is a question of what's going to happen next year. The taxpayers have to be told and have to be informed of what's happening. I feel that the government with this Act has not given us a clear indication of what's to be. The management of hazardous waste by the private sector can best be regulated directly by Environmental Protection. We have the Minister of Environmental Protection, and that's where it should be governed from.

The primary activity, the corporation managing Swan Hills, has been given over to Bovar, and that is something that I'm really totally against. The Alberta Liberals' policy is to encourage competition of safe treatment and disposal of hazardous waste. Thus we do not support the government operating the facility as an interim.

That's all I have to say on this one. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few remarks this afternoon on Bill 2, Special Waste Management Corporation Act Repeal Act. Before I go any further, since the last time I spoke on this, last week, we are well aware of the news release regarding the contamination in the immediate area, downwind in the Saulteaux River valley, immediately to the east of this plant. Many small mammals at the lower end of the food chain were apparently contaminated, and this is of importance later on in my discussion of this, but a little bit of background on the corporation, whenever it was first made.

The corporation provided for the development and operation of a special waste management system to protect the environment. It was to determine the needs of additional facilities. Now, we all know of the expansion of the waste treatment plant that went

ahead in the early part of this decade. It was also to ensure, where practical, that the special waste management facilities to be established were to be organized and operated by the private sector. There was also establishment and operation of facilities to deal with the hazardous wastes that were not adequately dealt with by other hazardous waste management facilities. We were going to promote exportation of special waste management technology and expertise. We were also going to conduct programs that promote the safe management of special waste.

Now, we know that over a period of time contaminated soil within the immediate area of a wellhead was exempt from this. It didn't have to be transported to Swan Hills to be burnt and then disposed of.

We have to be very careful about what we do with this facility in the future, and the future is very near. On December 31, 1998, Bovar may – and I stress “may” – return the Swan Hills facility to the province. What we need in the future is some form of this Alberta special waste treatment corporation to temporarily run the facility. And we may have to run this facility if the tests continue to be done in the monitoring of the Sauteaux River valley, which is in the proximity downwind from this plant. How much of that area will be contaminated? How far up the food chain will the contamination go and at what costs? Who is going to pay for the cleanup costs of this facility? Is it going to be next year, the next decade? Will our grandchildren have to pay for this?

Those are the remarks that I have this afternoon on Bill 2, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the Bill be reported? Are you agreed? [interjections] Order. We're trying to vote on this. Shall the Bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

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

THE CHAIRMAN: To refresh members of the committee as to where we're at, we're considering amendment A2, as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the amendment.

MR. SAPERS: On the amendment. Absolutely. We've had an opportunity to discuss the flaws in Bill 1 for some time, and of course we haven't had any clarity from the government about the intent behind Bill 1. We've already had one amendment proposed, and unfortunately it failed. The second amendment, Mr. Chairman, I believe is an amendment that is absolutely consistent with the government's stated intention around the passage of the freedom of information and privacy law in this province to begin with. The second amendment would amend section 3 in the proposed section 98(2) by adding the words “or July 1, 1998 whichever shall first occur” after the words “come into force on Proclamation.”

4:20

Now, the intent of this amendment is very clear. It's to impose a final deadline of July 1, 1998, for the application of the Act to all local bodies. This would mean that every local body which is currently not covered by the Act – every university, college, postsecondary institution, every municipality throughout the entire MUSH sector – would know with certainty that they would be expected to prepare themselves to fall under the jurisdiction of the freedom of information and privacy laws by July 1, 1998.

I've been told, Mr. Chairman, that there are several universities that are ready to go now. I've been told that there are municipalities that are ready to go now. I've been told that there are other organizations within the municipalities and schools and hospitals sector that are ready and in fact already believe that they are operating in accordance with this law and feel that somehow they're being left out, left behind, or treated differently or as second class because their constituents, the people they do business with, question them and say: “Well, how come you don't organize yourselves under this law? What are you trying to hide?” They say: we're not trying to hide anything, but it's that government that hasn't proclaimed those sections of the law yet that keeps us segregated, that treats us differently, that would have us somehow cast apart from those government departments which are subject to the freedom of information and privacy law. Well, this is a state of affairs that is frankly intolerable and shouldn't be allowed to persist.

When I had the privilege of serving on the all-party committee that studied the freedom of information and privacy needs and desires of the people of this province, it was made very clear to me that the people of Alberta are absolutely fair. They want everybody treated fairly, and they want equal access to information. They want to know with certainty what information is held as confidential, what's held as private. They want to know what kind of legal protection there is over those records and data sources that they believe should be held private. They also want to know what information they're entitled to. They want to know how to get that information. They don't want a hodgepodge. They don't want to have to search about and say: “Well, gee, if I want information from this hospital, do I apply under this regime or that regime? If I want information from this university, can I apply to the freedom of information and privacy commissioner or can't I? If I want information from my municipality, do I do it this way or that way? If my summer cottage is in one municipal district and my home is over here and I want some information on taxation and I want the same information and want to know how I'm being treated, am I going to have to go through two very different processes, or am I going to know with certainty that I have one place to go, one window, one way to approach it?”

Mr. Chairman, since we've opened up the legislation, since the government has seen fit to amend their own flagship Bill, the intent of this is to strengthen that Bill, to make freedom of information more accessible to the people of Alberta and to make protection of privacy more certain for the people of Alberta. There aren't many constituents who will be able to readily and easily tell you what is and isn't in the directory, published by Public Works, Supply and Services, of what government departments, commissions, and agencies are subject to the freedom of information and privacy law. There also aren't very many Albertans that would readily be able to explain why the government has been able to pick and choose which sections of that law they will proclaim. In fact, if you look at the way Bill 1 has been

structured, it leads you to wonder why we're even dealing with Bill 1 and not simply a set of order in council decisions about proclamation of certain sections.

Bill 1 in and of itself is a relatively useless piece of legislation. At least with this amendment it would have a reason for being, and it would be a clear signal that the government was serious about making freedom of information to Albertans a priority. It would create, as I say, this date certainty by which all public bodies would have to comply with the law and organize themselves accordingly.

Now, the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services hasn't gone to any trouble that I'm aware of to canvass Albertans about this particular issue. I'm not sure if the Minister of Advanced Education has spent any time talking to the universities and the colleges, and I'm not sure if the Minister of Municipal Affairs has talked to the municipalities or the Minister of Education to the school boards. I've asked: have you been consulted? Are you being brought up to speed? They say: well, no, not really. The answer I'm getting is: no, we haven't really heard; we haven't really been apprised of it. Then those same people that I asked make the inquiry to me. "Well, how is this law going to affect us? How should we organize ourselves? What are the implications for us? By the way, when will we have to do all this, and how come we don't know?"

So there is all of this uncertainty in the community, particularly in those parts of the community that should have a vested interest in this Bill. So even if there was some hesitation on the part of government supporters to say, "Well, we're not sure that we like the idea that the public bodies should be brought under this legislation," the fact is that the law is set up that they will at some point be subject to this legislation.

Even for those people who don't support the openness that this law suggests or the protection of privacy that this law would offer, at least they must support the principle of fairness so that those bodies which would be subject to this law should know with certainty when the law will apply. So to those members who may not be inclined to be big fans of freedom of information – and I know I've heard some members of the front bench talk about freedom of information as some sort of subversive plot – I would say subversive or not, it's the law of this province. They're sworn to uphold that law.

MR. SMITH: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Labour is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. SMITH: False motives, 23(h), (i), and (j). I would ask the member to clearly identify where in writing he has seen, how he can direct his allegations to the term "subversive plot," I believe is the term he used, as echoed by members of this front bench.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the purported point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Well, Mr. Chairman, there's no point of order. I suggested that members of the front bench have referred to freedom of information as a subversive plot. If the Minister of Labour would like me to name names, I'll do that, and I'll certainly do a *Hansard* search as well because the minister in

question has held several portfolios. He's currently the Minister of Energy. If the Minister of Labour would like to have chapter and verse read out, we can certainly do that. But there can clearly be no point of order because I'm not making a statement about the motives of any member. I'm simply saying what another member has uttered in this Chamber.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, the purported point of order cited 23(h) in the Standing Orders, "makes allegations against another member." I don't think either of them in speaking has identified a member that one could take that from. The hon. minister also cited 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." Perhaps there is something to the whole front bench, but that's hardly one other member or a specific member. "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Well, I suppose if the language is such that the hon. Minister of Labour objects to it – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has indicated he could do that if that's what the hon. member wished to do – then maybe that's to be done at another time. Right now we are on the clauses of Bill 1 in committee stage, and the Chair did not hear (h) or (i) to a specific member to the extent, I guess, that somebody objects to what you're saying. You could argue that maybe it was language likely to create disorder.

Other than that admonition, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to continue on the amendment to Bill 1 that we have before us.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the time you took in making that ruling and informing the Minister of Labour about the intent of the Standing Orders.

4:30

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: As I was saying, there's nobody on the opposition benches that would suggest that access to information and protection of privacy is any kind of a subversive plot. In fact, the argument that somehow providing access is subversive is frankly absurd. It's more of an argument to support this amendment, because if you want to subvert the intent of the law, then one way to do that would be to not create any certainty as to when the law will apply or to whom the law will apply. One of the principles of common law is that the law should be known to all, the law should be accessible to people, and people should have a general understanding of the application of the law. So in order to accomplish all of that, it makes sense that the legislation dealing with freedom of information should, of all things, be the most accessible, the most knowable, the most open. We can accomplish that in part by passing this amendment.

Now, it could be that some members of the front bench of the government are a little nervous about this because of course the Information and Privacy Commissioner has just issued a ruling that says that ministerial briefing notes are public, that they're subject to the freedom of information law. It could very well be that that's why there's some sensitivity, and that could be what really, truly provoked the Minister of Labour to raise a point of order. I don't know, but the fact that ministerial briefing notes should now be a matter of public record I'm quite frankly very happy about, and my constituents are very happy to know that. But they would be equally happy if they knew they had as open access to necessary information from other public bodies and, of course, if they had the certainty that their information would be well protected by those bodies as well.

This is a very straightforward amendment. I know it's an amendment that would have the sympathy of every member of the all-party committee that studied the freedom of information and access laws for this province. For many of the new members who weren't in the Assembly when we went through the various versions of what became Bill 1, what subsequently became the law of this province, for those new members who don't know all that history perhaps as well as some of the returning members do, I would suggest that this is their opportunity to put their own imprint on what really is watermark legislation for this province, for this government.

The Official Opposition for many years brought in private members' Bills calling for freedom of information legislation. The Premier, to his credit, responded, created a Bill, recognized that Bill was flawed, sent that Bill out for study, and called upon a select committee of the Legislature to do that study. That committee came back with a report. That report helped create very good legislation, still not perfect legislation but very good legislation. It would now be an opportunity for all members, particularly the newly elected members of this Assembly, as I say, to put their imprint on this piece of Alberta's history and heritage. It would be an opportunity for them to join with all of the other Albertans who have already made use of the freedom of information law and who have called for this law to be strengthened and who have also called for more certainty about the protection of private information that's held by public bodies.

So I would particularly encourage all the newly elected members to pay particular attention to this amendment and to understand the importance of this amendment, this being their opportunity to take part in something that would really be quite historic. I would encourage all members of the Assembly to support amendment A2, calling for the application of the law no later than July 1, 1998.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Labour on the amendment.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to speak briefly on the amendment and speak briefly in great opposition to this amendment because it typifies – and you may even read some of it in the media today – how the federal Liberals run their election campaign. They talk about doing stuff to Canadians. The Liberals in the same forum, in this Legislature, are talking about doing things to Albertans. This government acts in concert with Albertans. This government responds to Albertans. This government listens to Albertans. We do not arbitrarily pick dates out of the air and say: this sounds like a good time because, gee, I went for lunch today and there were seven strands of spaghetti on my plate. I mean, it just doesn't happen.

What this government does is it has an orderly consultation process that asks specific sectors out there who know they're going to be in compliance and, of course, the four or five people in the public domain who care very deeply about this issue, along with the two members of the Liberal Party we're in constant communication with. So it's very clear that this government is taking the right move by leaving the date open-ended and in effect asking the customer what they want. What we're getting back is that we have now put ourselves in a position, Mr. Chairman, where we're listening to Albertans. We're not telling Albertans, as we've heard time and time again from the opposition bench, that we know what's good for Albertans. This government responds.

MR. SAPERS: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Standing Orders: making an accusation about avowing motives. I would like the Minister of Labour to cite the individual and the time and place where that individual said, as a member of the Official Opposition, that we know what's best for Albertans. The Minister of Labour is making wild and baseless allegations. He is imputing the motives of myself and all of my colleagues, and he is doing a tremendous disservice to the thousands of Albertans who every day are concerned about access to information and privacy issues in this province.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Chairman, let me withdraw those remarks, because they have no idea what's good for Albertans.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think that perhaps with the lateness of the hour and the day of the week some members are becoming a bit sensitive as to what somebody may or may not infer about the motives of the other side. I wonder if we could address ourselves to the amendment that we have before us and the Bill that follows thereafter.

Debate Continued

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton . . . [interjections]

MR. SMITH: I'm rising to finish my remarks, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The Minister of Labour was labouring on about the amendment, yes. Sorry, hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's nice to know my impact with you continues.

Mr. Chairman, let me speak clearly and concisely on the amendment to the Bill and not digress on the foibles and weaknesses of the opposition, which are painfully obvious not only to me but to all Albertans, as represented by the low, low number of members that are present today in this Legislature as a result of the last election.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 1 was carefully crafted and put forward as a flagship Bill as well, similar to the freedom of information Bill in September of '93, for the purposes of bringing forward orderly disclosure of important and pertinent information to all Albertans. Yes, it is true that there was a select committee of the Legislature, an all-party committee that had unanimous agreement on the Bill, and it was working with that unanimous agreement that we moved forward on it with the amendment statute, Bill 1, of this session.

With the amendment specifically stating a date, again I would remind all members of this Assembly that the date is not a date that has been asked for from other venues, other sectors of this area that will be impacted. It's simply an amendment that says we, in typical Liberal largesse, feel that this is a good arbitrary date. That's not the way good government works. Good government consults, listens, responds, and ensures that there's agreement, Mr. Chairman, so that there is an effective time of disposition of accurate regulation and of accurate information.

4:40

More importantly, Mr. Chairman, because we've seen tremendous records of Liberal waste in government – fortunately, Alberta has been saved from Liberal rule since 1915, and that's a long time ago. With the implementation of this Act in the public sectors, the arbitrary date that is brought forth in this amendment is not the right thing to do, because what happens is that you want to learn from the process so that you can always reinvent, re-engineer, do things better, be able to amortize that very important resource that we use in Alberta, and that's called the taxpayer's dollar. We want to ensure that as this process rolls out, it rolls out in an economic fashion, it rolls out in an expeditious fashion, and it rolls out efficiently. In order to do that wisely and with suitable department, you have to pilot one, then you pilot the next, then the next, and you learn from each experience so that when you do a subsequent rollout, you have something that is effective, efficient, and works from day one. It's not this wide, expansive rollout so that you do not learn from your mistakes.

We've always been able to work closely with these sectors. They've been co-operative. This is what they're telling us. They have not asked us to put specific dates on it, Mr. Chairman. Because of that, it's fundamental to any business equation and also fundamental to any government equation that when you're in a position to be able to work closely in concert with a supplier or a customer, if it's in business, or a stakeholder group or consultancy of people affected by it if it's in government, you consult with them in such a way that they're telling you how best it works in their particular and unique situation, not how best it works with an arbitrary date. That clearly doesn't work.

If you look at the history of what we've done in government over the last four years and this monumental change that has taken place in Alberta, just for a second, Mr. Chairman – a monumental change where in 1993 there was a spending deficit of minus \$3.4 billion, and in today's world there's a projected surplus that may exceed \$2.2 billion. That's so important when you look to the amendment of this Bill. It's so important because when you look to the amendment of this Bill which talks about a specific date, it's says you could not have got from minus \$3.4 billion to plus \$2.2 billion by putting arbitrary dates and times on that. The process takes place in the grander circle called society, called the involved sectors, called the involved areas. In fact here with this government progress is made by consultation; progress is made by working with those stakeholder groups in close, close concert so that you have integration of the system through broad levels of government: through the provincial government, through the municipal level of government, and through various health authorities.

So to put an arbitrary date that's picked right out of the air that has absolutely no applicability to the Bill at all is mere folly. If you look back on the extensive debating time that has been put forward on this Bill, Mr. Chairman, you will find that they use these noneffective amendments, these nonapplicable amendments, these arbitrary amendments as simply a way to waste time.

Mr. Chairman, the one thing I would never want to be accused of is wasting time in this Legislature. Because of that, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

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

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 2. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill 8. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 1. 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 DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Second Reading**
Bill 14
Appropriation Act, 1997
(continued)

[Adjourned debate May 22: Mr. Hancock]

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see you back in the big Chair.

An opportunity to speak on the Appropriation Bill following that aborted debate we just had on the amendment to Bill 1 is very timely, because here we have a government that has said they want to be open and accountable and transparent, and they want to spend millions and billions of taxpayers' dollars and to do that with a really time-limited debate on appropriations.

We've gone through this really awkward committee-driven, parceled out, pieced out process of dealing with committee debates. Then we have the Minister of Labour, who has the audacity to talk about arbitrariness when it comes to applying the freedom of information law. I mean, of all the hypocrisy; I can't imagine anything that would exceed that level. You can't have it both ways. If you're talking about being an open and accountable government, if you're talking about being transparent, if you're talking about ensuring that the people of Alberta can be heard and in fact can hear back what the government's intentions are, then you would think there would have been a lot more effort to ensure that the estimates debates were more fruitful, more complete, not so rushed, and not so pieced out.

You also, then, would expect that you'd never hear a cabinet minister talk about posting a date which provides certainty to the people of Alberta as somehow being negative and arbitrary. So the irony of the moment didn't escape me, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure it didn't escape you. I couldn't help but comment on that particular irony.

Now I will turn directly to my comments on Bill 14. We've already heard from some members of the opposition about the extent to which we have felt compromised in debates. We've also tried on this side to be very responsible with the public purse. We've moved amendments which were rejected by the government, amendments, for example, that would reduce the amount of expenditure on standing policy committees. Now, these standing policy committees, as we know, are trumped up as committees of the Legislature when in fact what they really are are committees of the government caucus. We know that they're committees of

the government caucus because they only have government supporters on the committees. They wouldn't dare allow a member of the opposition to sit on one of those committees because they might actually get some input that they don't want to hear. That is not the hallmark of an open government. That's the hallmark of a government that's walking around with its ears closed and its eyes closed.

4:50

These standing policy committees really don't provide the public service that the government would have the public believe they do. The government presents these standing policy committees as though they really allow for broad-based public access, but what they really do is they stream people down some kind of a funnel. When you go to one of these standing policy committees, you're told that this is your legitimate way to access government. Don't go to the opposition; don't petition for a private member's Bill; don't organize support in the community or amongst stakeholders. No, no, no. Come – and often in secret – to a standing policy committee meeting, say your piece, we'll give you a cup of tea, and we'll send you on your way. Hardly what I would call the activities of an open-minded government.

So given that these standing policy committees don't serve the broad public interest and given that they really are a misappropriation of funds because they are serving the government caucus and not the Legislative Assembly, we've moved very responsible amendments to limit the amount of funding of these committees. But did those amendments receive consideration from the government? Not at all, because of course they'd be contrary to their little sort of plot to keep these committees going, to keep up the charade that these committees are really the way in which they collect broad public input.

We've tried in debates, as well, to raise legitimate questions about business plans and the lack of integrity in those business plans, the lack of consistency in those business plans. We've asked for the government to make sure that the format for performance measures is governmentwide. That hasn't happened. We've asked for the format of the standards and goals and objectives statements to be consistent. That hasn't happened. And many members of the opposition, at least of the Liberal opposition, have been present in debates to ask questions – specific, focused, dollar-related questions – that have been left unaddressed by members of the government.

Now, some members of cabinet have been particularly good in providing written responses in a timely way. Some members have but not all, and even those members that have provided responses haven't provided complete responses. So here we are Members of the Legislative Assembly, all private members, not just members of the Official Opposition but all private members, left with a quandary.

That quandary is simply this. The purpose of estimates debate is to hold the government accountable for its spending plans. We do that by posing questions to the government. Those lucky chosen few who sit on the front bench provide answers, or don't, at their option. Then as private members – whether it be myself as a member of the Liberal Official Opposition or whether it be a private member, a government supporter, perhaps from Fort Saskatchewan – we are then called to pass judgment on the quality of the information provided and the quality of the answers given. How can we do that if there are no responses? How can we do that if there's not enough time? How can we with good conscience provide supply to this government to spend upwards of 12 billion and more tax dollars when they don't answer questions?

How are we supposed to go back to our constituents and say:

“Yes, absolutely, I'm confident that every dollar we're spending on that highway project, every dollar we're spending on that tax incentive, every dollar we're spending over here on that government initiative or some other government initiative is good value. And I know it's good value because I asked the minister, and the minister answered my questions in an open and honest and fair way.” I can't say that, can't look my constituents in the eye and say that. So what I'm forced to say instead, Mr. Speaker, is you know what? “Government wouldn't tell me. Government didn't answer my question. The minister wouldn't say.”

What's even worse is that they'll say: “Well, why didn't you stop it? You were there. We elected you. You're in the Legislature. You're supposed to be looking after my interest and the interest of my neighbours and the interest of my community. Why didn't you stop them?” And then what I'm forced to say is: “Well, you know, I couldn't stop them because this government has gotten it into their heads that they can do whatever they want. This government has taken it upon themselves to think that they control the agenda.” Not the taxpayers, not the people of the province but those less than two dozen members of the front bench have taken it upon themselves to make decisions, to have the arrogance of deciding what information they'll be forthcoming with and what information they won't be forthcoming with, and to have the audacity to say: well, if you don't like it, just wait for the next election.

This government confuses its responsibility to be servants of the people with its own need to exercise power. These are not the same thing, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they should be mutually exclusive. In fact, this government needs to be reminded that simply by virtue of achieving a majority vote, it does not mean they can run roughshod over the taxpayers of this province and simply take those tax dollars the Treasurer talks about, those – what does he call them? – sweat-soaked loonies of the people of this province and spend them any way that they want to.

It's not unique to just estimates debates. We've been told early on in this session that this government does not intend to recall the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the fall for a second sitting of this Legislature. Now, why would they say that? Well, when questioned, the Premier of the province alluded to this, Mr. Speaker. He said: you know what? We may not have to recall the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for a fall sitting because we may not have a legislative agenda.

Mr. Speaker, that is not the purpose of recalling the Legislative Assembly of Alberta: because the government may be devoid of ideas. That's irrelevant. The reason why the men and the women of this Chamber get together under this dome and conduct business is to hold the government accountable for what they've done and for what they haven't done. If the government doesn't have a legislative agenda, then that's even more argument to justify the necessity for a fall sitting. The people of Alberta will demand that this government be accountable, and if they don't have any good ideas, then maybe they should ask the Lieutenant Governor to dissolve the government and hold another general election. I think the people of Alberta would be very surprised to know that they have a government that (a) confuses the role of the Legislature and (b) doesn't really care, because they think it's all about them instead of all about the people of Alberta.

So I see this vote on the Appropriation Bill as really being far broader in implication than simply a vote on whether or not we agree with the individual departmental spending plans, because of course we could only agree in part, if at all, because we simply, as I've said, don't have all of the information. But it also speaks to a government attitude, to a philosophy, to an arrogance, as I've said, of government in terms of what they think they can get away

with just because there's more of them than somebody else. It kind of reminds me of school yard bullies, Mr. Speaker, or those children that taunt and say, "My father's bigger than your father," as though might makes right.

Mr. Speaker, the problem that I have with Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, is not that it would provide supply to the necessary programs and services that Albertans expect of government, not that it would provide funding for those Albertans who require support through AISH, those Albertans who require hospitalization, those senior Albertans who find themselves dependent on long-term care, or those schoolchildren that look to provincial government funding to provide them with the best quality of education they can possibly scrape out, given the circumstances. That's not why I would be opposed to this Appropriation Bill. I'm opposed to this Appropriation Bill because of what I believe it represents, the attitude with which it's been presented, the way in which estimates debates have been conducted.

But now I am truly on the horns of a dilemma, because if I vote against the Appropriation Bill, then I would be denying that supply to those government departments that I know will provide some good works for some Albertans. Not everything this government does is bad or corrupt. Unfortunately too much of it is, but not everything.

So here we are at second reading, when I'm supposed to be addressing principle. I suppose it's safe for me to say no to Bill 14 at second reading because at second reading, as I've made it clear, the reason why I can vote against appropriation is for all of those reasons of openness and transparency, fairness and equity that I've discussed.

Now, when it comes to committee debate on this Bill, maybe the government will be humbled. Maybe the government will take heed of what they're being told, not just by members of the Official Opposition but also by Albertans from one corner of this province to another. Maybe they will accept some amendment. Maybe they will modify their spending habits on things like standing policy committees of, supposedly, the Legislative Assembly, which are really just dressed-up committees of the government's own caucus. Maybe they will accept those kinds of amendments. Maybe then after committee I'll be able to change my mind and vote in good conscience to support this Bill. And maybe something even more miraculous will happen, Mr. Speaker: maybe over the weekend we'll get all of those information requests that I've talked about. Maybe every minister is going to go home this weekend with their laptop, their government-issued computer, they're going to bang out the detailed responses to those questions. I'll get back to my desk Monday morning, and there'll be this stack of papers on my desk that'll probably be about three feet high, and it'll have the detailed responses to every one of those questions.

5:00

You know what? We will burn the midnight oil in the opposition caucus. We'll analyze those responses. We'll read them. We'll debate them. We'll make sure that they've satisfied the information requests, and, Mr. Speaker, if they have, I'll be the first one to march in this Assembly at the next opportunity and I'll say: Thank you, government, for finally being honest and open; thank you, government, for providing the answers to those questions. Then I'll be able to support this Bill. But until all of that happens, I'm afraid that I just can't support this or them.

Thanks.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to pick up where my hon. colleague left off, I think there's a lesson to be learned, a lesson that occurred across the ocean very recently: an election that was about government arrogance, about years and years worth of entrenching within government a belief that it was not about the people, that it was not about the taxpayers, that it was about them. I'm speaking about the election recently in Britain, an election that concluded an era of governance with respect to – a Conservative governance, I might add – Margaret Thatcher, a government which in many respects has mentored and which our friends across the way have attempted to model here.

I think there's a lesson to be learned with respect to this budget, Mr. Speaker, a lesson to be learned with respect to openness and accountability from that election. As we all know, significant change in leadership and direction has been mandated by the people of that country. I found it of interest to read the platform and the strategies undertaken by the party that succeeded in that election, promises that were made and issued on cards that spoke of – and this is of interest and relevance to our budget – promises to cut class size to 30 for children under the ages of five, six, and seven, a promise to eliminate waiting lists by treating an extra hundred thousand patients a year. Does that sound similar to anyone in this Assembly? It sounds awfully familiar to me. So I think there's a lesson to be learned.

Obviously we're caught in a process that is not going to be changed in the course of today or in this session. I think that there is a lesson to be learned, that if there is not an improvement, if there is not an opening of processes, if there is not a better means of accountability to be found by the government across the way, they may go the way of the dodo bird or, in the case of which I speak, the British Conservatives and be replaced by a party with a conscience.

I want to just further my comments with respect to that by speaking about the standing policy committees and to also re-emphasize the lack of ministerial responses to opposition questions. In the position where I am, respectfully, just learning the processes, it is fascinating to me that members of this Assembly sit on a standing policy committee and are paid to do so and by that have the ability to see many aspects of the Appropriation Act not once, not twice, perhaps on numerous occasions, while members of the opposition are never allowed to consider or be open to those until they come forward for debate. Then, Mr. Speaker, when the proposals for approval are brought forward by way of the Appropriation Act or actually through the other departmental budgets, the ministers do not have the courtesy to respond to the questions in writing when they've gone on record as saying that they would.

How can we have any degree of trust in someone who has agreed to take the responsibility to lead a department, reasonable questions that are needed to make decisions on are asked, they commit to give the answers, and they do not. I would re-emphasize the statements that have been made with respect to that, the lack of openness, the lack of accountability, and the implications of that long term for the hon. members on the government side with respect to that.

I wanted to speak specifically to page 4 in the Appropriation Act. I found it of interest to do some comparisons to the different sections. These are operating expenses: Advanced Education, \$1.1 billion; economic development, \$119 million; Family and Social Services, Education, Health, Health being \$3 billion, Family and Social Services and Education, \$1 billion. All of those departments necessitating over a billion dollars in allocations.

Then let's just for a moment look at the Department of Labour.

Well, what do we find? Thirty-two million dollars. What an interesting contrast. All of the departments I named previously employ people of this province to provide services to the general populace of the province, but when it comes to the department that supports not only those employees but the employees of the public sector, we do not seem to be able in this government to find the justification to even allocate half – it's almost a fifth – of the allocations made for all of those other departments for the department that supports employees in this province. That is reflective, I think, of the lack of priority that is placed on labour in this province and the subversive means that are taken in many forms and by many departments to undermine the Employment Standards Code, to undermine the working conditions of people in this province, and to undermine the organizations, the unions in this province whose existence is to serve, to advocate, and to represent employees and to promote their socioeconomic status.

Perhaps that's all elementary, Mr. Speaker, but I guess I speak to it knowing the relationship between the social determinants of health, those social determinants of health not only being defined singularly by accessing services or working within a particular sector but by being able to afford to eat nutritional foods, being able to live in an adequate house, to have sufficient income to be able to pay for medical prescriptions that are required. All of those things and the achievement of those things come into play in the Department of Labour, yet we don't seem to be able to find sufficient means to support that department.

I would not put it past subsequent governments, Mr. Speaker, to attempt to contract it out, quite frankly. It's been significantly reduced, if you look at previous estimates, and I think it's a reflection of the lack of priority and perhaps a greater mandate this government appears to think they have to foster the free market in the province to the detriment of general citizens and employees.

5:10

I'd like to turn my comments now to the human deficit. My hon. colleagues on this side of the House have already spoken to that. I would like to be more specific with respect to where in fact Alberta sits with respect to the human deficit. It's of interest to me that in 1993 family poverty rates in Alberta were by percentage higher than any of the Atlantic provinces; 15.1 percent of Alberta families lived in poverty in comparison to 13.5 percent in the Atlantic provinces. How is that for the Alberta advantage, Mr. Speaker? How is that for the Alberta advantage? [interjections] I know that the hon. members hate to hear that. They like to promote that all is well, that we're living in a rose garden, but the reality is that it is not true. It is not true.

Now, what is worse is if you look at the incidence of children in poverty. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few moments we're going to make some decisions. This particular section is

wide-ranging, as the Chair's already ruled. I wonder if we could give the hon. member the courtesy of not interrupting her even if we choose not to listen.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that intervention. I hate to incite the hon. members across the way. I know that they don't like to hear the types of statistics and realities that I raise with respect to this, and I'm afraid that the next performance measure I'm going to raise is going to be perhaps even more irritating to them.

Let's look at the incidence of child poverty. Let's look at where Alberta sat in 1994 in contrast to the other provinces in this country. Once again Alberta, at 18.5 percent, was higher than any Atlantic province, higher than New Brunswick, higher than Prince Edward Island, higher than Ontario for child poverty, not higher but very, very close to Newfoundland for child poverty. When I looked at the Appropriation Act, actually when I looked at many of the departmental budgets, there were absolutely no allocations to address either singularly or in an integrated fashion the increasing incidence of child poverty in Alberta, not a single one. But we continue to be able to make allocations to provide advanced medical technology and equipment. We continue to be able to provide millions of dollars for computer technology.

Mr. Speaker, the hard, sad reality is that children are going hungry. Children are not living in circumstances that are supportive of those children being able to concentrate and learn in schools. They are not being supported to live in environments that teach them that it is unhealthy physically, emotionally, socially to experiment with drugs, to experiment with alcohol, to practise sex without protection. They are in environments where because they're living in poverty, at low incomes, they are not given the supports, not just by their parents but by the other members, whether it be in education – they're not able to receive the supports that they require to prepare them to live a healthy lifestyle and to be contributing adults.

The issue of poverty is one that's of particular importance today, when we are having a western provinces conference in this city this evening. It is bringing people from all of the western provinces to Edmonton to try and address the growing incidence of that.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, but in accordance with Standing Order 61(3) the Chair is required to put the question to the House on the Appropriation Bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

[At 5:16 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

