

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 27, 1997 1:30 p.m.

Date: 97/05/27

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. The prayer today is condensed from one that is said in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and the welfare of all of our people.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm kind of hidden from the console, so they wouldn't know to turn it on unless you identify me. Well, my height might be a deterrent too.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce today a petition signed by 292 Albertans asking the Alberta government to introduce legislation which would prohibit the use of replacement workers during strike action.

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce a petition signed by about a hundred Calgarians, some of whom live in Calgary-Egmont, with regards to VLTS.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the Clerk's office has been provided with a copy of this signed motion. I'm giving oral notice of the following motion:

Be it resolved that further consideration of any or all of the resolutions, clauses, sections, or titles of Bill 1, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 1997, shall, when called, be the first business of the committee and shall not be further postponed.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will move written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

I also give notice that tomorrow I will move motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 25.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I wish to give oral notice of Bill 21, the School Amendment Act, 1997, which I will introduce in this House tomorrow.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to make three tablings. The first is called the East Village Community Study: Final Report. The second is a newspaper article which is called Homeless Study Out Today, and the third is a summation of shelters for homeless adults, which we in the Department of Family and Social Services spend \$6.1 million on, and women's shelter, which is \$8 million.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today copies of a letter dated May 27, 1997, that I've sent to the Minister of Labour setting out a constructive alternative to the invocation of closure to be able to ensure that Bill 1 can be brought in a way that meets the legitimate needs of Albertans.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter that was sent to all the dentists in the province from the Alberta Dental Association. It's an opinion from a law firm, Reynolds, Mirth, Richards & Farmer. The second is a letter that was given by the Alberta Dental Association dentists to their patients. It's entitled Questions about Managed or Preferred Dental Plans.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table four copies of a report titled Safety, Security and Development of Children: A Response to the Redesign of Children's Services, published by workers opposed to the redesign of children's services in the province.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Chair is filing with the Assembly today the appropriate copies of a letter from the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross to the Speaker requesting that Bill 205, the Protection from Second-hand Smoke in Public Buildings Act, be brought to Committee of the Whole on Wednesday, May 28, 1997.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce a great group of students and their parents and their teachers from Camilla school in Rivière Qui Barre in my riding. They're with their parent helpers Mrs. Trahan, Mrs. Hengen, Mrs. Rouault and teacher aides Arlene Whitson and Debbie Brenners and their teacher Amanda Langford. The second teacher I'm a bit partial to as well as one boy in his class: my son Jim and my husband, Raymond Soetaert. Would they please all stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you today and to members of the Assembly two

visitors from the provincial riding of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. They are Rick Jantz, who ran as a New Democrat in the last election and, I'm pleased to say, came in second – he's now president of the constituency association – and the secretary of the constituency association, who teaches at the Augustana University College, John Johansen. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 11 students accompanied by their instructor, Andrew Usher. These are students from Connections Canada, which is an international school for adults. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister of children's services.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very honoured to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly two wonderful ladies: Mrs. Kay Long, who is seated in the member's gallery and is joining us from Kinuso, Alberta, and she's joined by her mother, Mrs. Grace Goodway, who is visiting us from Portland, Oregon. I'd ask that they both rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you grandparents from throughout the province who are here to watch third reading on Bill 204. Because of the number of grandparents here, I would like to introduce Florence Knight, president of the Canadian Grandparents' Rights Association, and Annette Bruce, president of the Orphaned Grandparents Association, and I'd like to ask all of the grandparents to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Homeless People

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's neoconservative policies and the changing . . . [interjections] They're distancing themselves from the old Conservatives. The neoconservative policies and changing economic conditions in Alberta have resulted in the gap between rich and poor people widening dramatically. While many have made advances, there are many who have been forgotten and have been left behind. Those left behind are not lazy, they are not unwilling to work, and they are not looking for a handout. Many of them have life circumstances most of us in this Legislature could not even begin to imagine. Many have mental illnesses or disabilities which make it difficult for them to find food or to find shelter for themselves. My question is to the minister of social services. Given that the minister has said that there are a lot of scientific studies showing that people choose to live on the street, would he please elaborate on those studies and table them in the House? A *Calgary Sun* article and these two pages do not constitute a lot of scientific studies. This is what he's just tabled in the House.

1:40

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, this is the one that I tabled. I think the hon. member must be having difficulty with mathematics, because there are five pages here. It's entitled the East Village Community Study: Final Report, written by P. Lynn McDonald and Tracy Peressini in January of 1992.

When I made those comments, Mr. Speaker, I was quite simply saying that there are some people who choose that type of lifestyle. That is not gloating. That is not doing anything apart from identifying a problem. My department spends \$14 million on this problem. If we can't identify this problem, if we can't find out what these people are, the way they think, then we can't help them. It's absolutely imperative that we help this segment of the population, but to ignore them, to say that they don't exist, to say that they will simply vanish and go away is entirely wrong.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the minister of social services actually read the Peressini study, which he is now referring to, where it says that stereotypes like homeless by choice, a statement by Ronald Reagan, in fact are not adequate in explaining the condition of the homeless. So why is this minister standing in the House and using this as an explanation or a justification for his statement that people actually choose to be homeless? What an ignorant thing to say.

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, ignorance is something that is on the other side of the House.

If I could continue, if I could read what this states:

An especially popular view that sprang to life during the Reagan years was that most of the homeless are, as Reagan put it, "well we might say, homeless by choice," . . . A careful reading of the literature . . .

and, Mr. Speaker, this is what the person who just called me ignorant refused to say

. . . would suggest that all of these stereotypes are true of some homeless people and none of them are true of all homeless people.

Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that there is a segment of the population – it is a very small segment. We have looked at it, and it's probably less than 5 percent. But to ignore those 5 percent, to ignore those people, which the opposition has told us to do, is absolutely wrong.

MR. MITCHELL: Will the minister in his answer to my next question stand in the House and acknowledge the next sentence, right after the one he just read, which says, "The causes of homelessness implied in these stereotypes are not adequate in explaining the condition of" the homeless. Mr. Speaker, he is using a study to defend a position which it doesn't defend.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be an inherent lack of understanding going on here. What I stated is that there was a percentage, albeit a very small percentage, of homeless people that have chosen to live on the streets. We are spending \$14 million a year to go out and try and envelop these people, to try and help these people. If we ignore them, if we say that they don't exist, such as the Liberal opposition is now saying, that is wrong.

THE SPEAKER: Second main opposition question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Freedom of Information

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In an April 15 news release the Premier said that freedom of information laws would be extended first to the education sector in the fall of 1998 and then later to the health sector. Now in an April issue of the newsletter of the government's Mental Health Advisory Board we are told that RHAs will be covered by FOIP on October 1, 1997. I can table the copies at this point. To the Premier: will school boards be brought under FOIP on October 1 of this year at the same time as RHAs or at some earlier date?

MR. KLEIN: That's a good question. I do know, Mr. Speaker, that there is a process in place to allow the agencies in the so-called MUSH, MASH, or HUM sector to phase themselves in to the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation. Relative to the specifics related to time lines, I'll have the hon. Minister of Labour reply.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the movement out of this piece of legislation is going to be done with consultation in those specific groups. Once this Act is in place, that is the catalyst that allows this to occur through that consultation process, and it will be in full compliance with the Act; in other words, before the five-year period of the Act.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we're dealing basically with Bill 1, which is scheduled to be in Committee of the Whole today, so I sincerely hope we're not anticipating anything.

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the Premier telling Albertans one date when the Minister of Health's agent is telling them something completely different?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I tend to agree with you. As I understand, this legislation is working its way through the Legislative Assembly, and I would think that the best time to address those questions would be during debate on this issue.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order.

MRS. PAUL: My third question, Mr. Speaker: if the 17 regional health authorities say that they will be ready for FOIP by October 1, 1997, why will the Premier not hold universities and municipalities to the same date? What's the delay? Why are you delaying?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, there is a voluntary component to this particular piece of legislation, and relative to the specifics I'll have the hon. minister reply.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, indeed the Minister of Health may wish to supplement the remarks, but firstly, yes, the Bill is under consideration; secondly, this government will be in full compliance with the act; and thirdly, when you talk about the process of implementing through a broad array of government sectors such as universities, education, and municipalities, those who are prepared to comply and can do so without onerous pressure or price are certainly more than willing to do so. But we do think that it's important to those organizations as well as to this government that it's done in an orderly process such that the taxpayer's expense is absolutely minimized.

Kananaskis Country

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, last year the government consulted

the public on the future recreation policy for Kananaskis Country, and the policy was supposed to be ready by July 1996. The results of the first survey showed that nearly 80 percent of the respondents did not want any further recreational development. Now the Minister of Environmental Protection has announced that he intends to hold another survey because he didn't get the answer he wanted the first time. Why is the minister now planning a second round of consultations on recreational policy on Kananaskis, yet hasn't consulted the public on plans to privatize parks and recreational areas across the whole province?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the issue as it relates to Kananaskis Country was that back some year and a half ago we discovered that there were a whole host of applications to develop major developments within Kananaskis Country. I was very concerned about the fact that there were so many coming forward and that the plans that were in place for the recreation area and the park were some 20 years old and were established at a time when there was actually a desire to move forward with a lot of development. So it seemed reasonable to me that we would go out and find out if in fact the public was still anxious to have the level of development that could be accommodated under the existing plans that apply to Kananaskis Country.

1:50

Now, I admit that I did ask the committee to move too quickly on it and discovered at one point in the whole consultation that in fact the public was not being totally consulted. At that point I was receiving many, many phone calls from around the province, people that were opposed to more development complaining that they hadn't had an opportunity to have input into the whole overall policy. So we decided that we would take the information that we received, that we would use that information to move forward with a more comprehensive review of the policy. It's certainly given us a lot of very good information, what we've already gathered, and we will be hiring a consulting firm to undertake further consultation with the public as we move forward to develop a plan for Kananaskis Country. It may very well be that it will have less development not more.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, if he's so concerned, then why doesn't he review the 10-year-old study, which is the integrated resource plan? That's the plan that needs studying, and that would talk about the integrated use of grazing leases and oil and gas exploration and other kinds of development in that country. That's the study that he needs to be reviewing right now.

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the IRP that the hon. member is referring to is one that dovetails into the development plan for Kananaskis Country. Certainly I'm sure that there will be comments made about that IRP in the consultation that we're going to undertake in the development policy for Kananaskis Country.

MS CARLSON: He needs to target that IRP, and he knows it, and he won't do it.

Mr. Speaker, why is the government designating the Spray Lakes area as a recreational area for private development even before the second consultation phase when this area provides important wildlife corridors and should be protected as a natural heritage site? You're setting it up to be further developed.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, in order for there to be a major development in Kananaskis Country, one that affects the environment to any great extent, it must go through the NRCB.

As far as us setting up new areas, I'm not sure what the hon. member is talking about because in fact there are already designations within the area. The IRP certainly identifies areas for development. There have been some hearings through the NRCB. They have identified some areas for development.

As I said yesterday, we got a quote from the hon. member saying that it's great that we're going forward with more consultation, and now she seems to be worried that we're doing too much consultation. I'm not sure where it's all coming from.

Health Care Premiums

MS BARRETT: Alberta has a flat tax on health care. It's known as your monthly health care premium. The low-income cutoffs, Mr. Speaker, are so low that only the poorest of Albertans qualify, but more importantly, the worst hits go to the unemployed, because the formula says that whether or not you are going to receive the subsidy is based upon your previous year's income. So when you lose your job, you don't get a subsidy, and you don't get your employer sharing that \$68 a month premium. What I'd like to ask the Minister of Health about today is this: how can the government justify charging Albertans who are in arrears on their health care premiums an annualized rate of 19.25 percent, a rate higher even than the credit card companies charge?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, with respect to premiums which go into arrears, we do have to have an interest rate, a penalty, because, as the hon. member neglects perhaps to indicate, there are people who fall into arrears who are not involved in being unemployed.

With respect to the individuals in the unemployed category, Mr. Speaker, the payment of arrears and their circumstances with respect to premiums are appealable through the process set up in Alberta Health. There is a process for looking at these individual cases and dealing with them fairly.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health has cut a deal to collect this money through Equifax. I'll file four copies of a premium statement which will prove this to be true. Is the minister prepared to reveal to Albertans what percentage cut Equifax/Canadian Bonded Credits gets out of every dollar it collects for the Alberta government?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly look into that matter and provide any information that is possible outside of the rules of confidentiality.

MS BARRETT: Well, I don't think that it's outside the rules of confidentiality, Mr. Speaker, so I'll ask the minister this: will he table tomorrow the contract between Alberta health care insurance plan and Equifax/CBC so that all Albertans can become aware of what kind of money these collection agencies are making off Albertans who can't afford to pay their premiums?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just reiterate something that I said earlier, and that is that we should not take from the hon. member's question that the only category of people that are in arrears on their premiums and should be pursued in terms of paying them are in the category of people being unemployed or in some other situation of difficulty. So I just want to emphasize that.

In terms of the contract, Mr. Speaker, certainly I will look into that and provide a response to the hon. member.

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

Alberta Growth Summit

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Premier. There's a lot of interest being generated about the upcoming Alberta Growth Summit both in my constituency and across the province. I'd like to ask the Premier if he can outline to the Assembly the actual objectives of the summit.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Puffball. Puffball.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. I don't consider this to be a puffball question in the least. This is a meaningful question because it is an extremely important event coming up near the end of November.

Mr. Speaker, the overall question being put to all sectors involved in the Growth Summit is really: how we can ensure sustainable growth from now until at least the year 2005, and how can we as a province respond to the pressures of growth and to the rising demand for public services while continuing to live within our means? Part of that is: how do we deal with the pressures being put on us by the opposition Liberal party to spend and spend and spend more and at the same time abide by the fundamental principle? We go into this Growth Summit with one guiding principle, and that is the principle of no longer incurring deficits – in other words, we cannot go into deficit financing – and continuing with our commitment to pay down debt without raising taxes. So we must ensure that we stick to balanced budgets and debt retirement as we go through this process. The bottom line is that the integrity of our existing fiscal framework must remain in place.

Secondly, the focus of this summit will be placed on creating strategies that are sustainable within that framework, and these strategies must be good in the long run for all Albertans.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the strategies developed at the summit should reflect the principles of outcome-based management consistent with good business planning.

2:00

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how accessible will the Growth Summit be to the general public?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is the matter of logistics. Dr. Percy and myself, the co-chairmen, have decided that this has to be a manageable process. Therefore we've invited seven sectors, seven facilitators representing seven various sectors of Alberta society, the key sectors of Alberta society, to put in a place a process that would accommodate about 80 Albertans, an equal amount to represent those sectors. Basically those people will be in the areas of the agencies that spend the dollars and the agencies that generate the revenues so as to create some kind of a balance.

Mr. Speaker, there is not room in the facility to accommodate all Albertans. Therefore I'll be discussing with Dr. Percy a process to accommodate the media, a process to accommodate within reasonable limits observers to the summit. Certainly I encourage not only members of my own caucus, not only people

who have an interest in this process to organize their own small mini summits to feed into the major summit. I challenge the Liberals to do the same thing and the NDs to do the same thing. Really, let's make this a meaningful process. We will try to make it as open as we possibly can but understanding that it has to be a manageable process.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Premier for that clarification. You've partly answered my last question. It's a common question asked by the public, but I will ask: will the government listen to the issues raised at the summit?

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

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that goes back to my answer to the very first question, that it must be outcome based. Yes, we do want specific recommendations. We do expect to come out of this summit a process to establish a decision-making model so indeed we can put in place proper decisions and policies relating to managing growth in this province understanding that we do have that commitment to balance budgets and to the orderly pay-down of the debt. So yes. This is not going to be an exercise just to demonstrate to the Alberta public that we are simply talking about these issues, but it's going to be an exercise that will be based on outcome and decisions relative to policy for the future.

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

VLT Plebiscites

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The citizens of Black Diamond filed a legal petition for a plebiscite to ban VLTs. The town council passed a resolution not to proceed with it because of a \$3,000 cost. Officials in Municipal Affairs have told the citizens: take the matter to court at a cost of \$10,000, or circulate a petition to get rid of that council. Might I remind the Premier that he made a commitment, a promise that citizens have the right to decide the matter of VLTs in their municipality. To the Premier: what action are you prepared to take to fulfill your commitment, your promise to the citizens of Black Diamond who simply followed the understanding given by the Premier and the former minister of lotteries?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know the specifics as they relate to Black Diamond. I do know that in Rocky Mountain House, once the legal problems were sorted out, we moved immediately to remove the VLTs from that municipality. I understand that there are some legal considerations with respect to the VLTs in Sylvan Lake, where a similar vote was taken.

I don't know the situation relative to Black Diamond, but perhaps the Minister of Municipal Affairs does, and I will have her supplement my answer.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to supplement the answer for two reasons. First of all, in terms of the right number to accomplish the objectives of the petition, I believe that on a population base there are about nine additional citizens that have petitioned for the removal of the VLTs over and above that magic figure they had to have as the right figure for the petition. I visited and spent a whole day main-streeting in Black Diamond and found to my great enthusiasm that in actual fact many of the

people felt that the issue had passed. I indicated that I'd be very pleased if the petitioners or anybody wanted to contact me by letter to follow up. I have received no such letter. I'm aware that our officials have not only indicated their rights legally for challenge but that they can, in fact, write to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and request intervention.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my second question to the Premier: will you intervene to ensure that the citizens of Black Diamond have the right to vote on the question of VLTs as they were promised?

MR. KLEIN: Well, there are rules relative to petitions under the Municipal Government Act. Now, if they abide by all those rules relative to the petition or if the town council decides on its own, as did the city council in Fort McMurray, to have a plebiscite on the issue, Mr. Speaker, and providing that all the legal requirements have been fulfilled, then we will do as we did in Rocky Mountain House, and that is move in and, according to the wishes of the local municipality, remove the VLTs.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my last question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: is the minister indicating to me that upon receipt of a letter from the citizens of Black Diamond, she is prepared to intervene and ensure that that plebiscite is held in accordance with the Municipal Government Act?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Government Act still provides the council some discretion to evaluate the results of that petition. It's my understanding that there are some complexities associated with this issue, not the least of which is the belief they have that there are other factors that play into this situation. It's an interesting case which could best be described over a cup of tea. If I could, I would like to just assure this House that I will act according to the legislation and that I will intervene only if requested to do so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Investment Activity

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the financial markets in Toronto and Montreal experienced record highs in a number of industry sectors buoyed by good economic news here in Canada and stable interest rates in the U.S. To the Provincial Treasurer: were last week's gains in Toronto and Montreal experienced by the Alberta Stock Exchange?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, yes. It's an important question. The optimism that is present throughout the country is especially dominant in Alberta, and because of the economic climate in Alberta, especially in the industrial and the oil and gas sectors, clearly we also saw a similar, very positive action in the market as was experienced and reflected on the Toronto exchange.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: has Bre-X impacted the resource markets in Alberta as there was speculation that resource markets generally would be impacted?

MR. DAY: I think it's fair to say that in the wake of the Bre-X crash there was a wave of speculation suggesting that investors in general would simply cease to invest and that markets would be

destroyed. There was everything from reflections that there'd be a slight dip in market trends to basically the end of the world. What has been seen is that on the Alberta market trading is still very high, as a matter of fact 13 million shares daily, which is very positive and strong. Interestingly enough, reflecting on Bre-X and possible effects there, I think it's fair to say that people looking at exploration based on foreign or international speculation are looking very closely.

In terms of mining and resources in general – and if you remember, Mr. Speaker, there was speculation especially in those areas that investors would just vacate, that they would just run and flee. Of the 14 sectors – this is reflected on the Toronto exchange – 12 are experiencing growth, utilities being first, followed by mining and resources. So investors have assessed the situation and clearly are continuing to eye the market with an optimistic view.

2:10

MR. MAGNUS: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. One of the advantages of the Alberta market over Toronto is our junior capital pool program. Have recent events affected the success of this particular program?

MR. DAY: Well, among some of the more extreme speculators, Mr. Speaker, who felt that all investing and markets and everything else would just immediately crash, again there was some concern that the junior capital pools in Alberta would be especially affected. I'm pleased to report that investors who know what these companies are all about and people who know what Albertans are doing are very confident in the ongoing success. In fact, in terms of these junior capital markets, they are very strong and continuing with very good volumes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Ammonite Reserves

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Energy department has announced that they'll be going through a full review of policy in connection with the ammonite lands that they hold in Alberta this fall. In response to this the collectors have now formed a provincial association to help them get input into this. We find out now that in early June, supposedly the 2nd of June, the Energy department will put up for disposal all the lands it holds as part of its ammonite reserve. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Could you elaborate a little bit on what your disposal letter means when it says that these reserves will be disposed of on a first come, first served basis?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the introduction to this, I think, is confusing two issues. We said that we would meet with various people to discuss the future of these reserves in the province, and the other has to do with the legal right to dispose of these rights to access ammonite. We will do it under the same criteria we do with all mineral reserves in the province of Alberta, on a proposal basis.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, on a proposal basis. Does that mean that they will be bidding on it in terms of dollars available to the public in terms of access to these lands? Is that what you're talking about? The same as the oil companies do?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the hon. member is aware that at the present time we do not have a royalty structure for ammonite, and therefore it will be a proposal meeting all the requirements to go on to those lands. There will not be a charge-back because of the minute amount and the calculation problems with it. So, again, I reiterate that I'm sure the hon. member is aware that there is no return to the Crown per se as royalty on this land.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question again to the minister is: with the review that's under way in terms of the future of ammonite and the process that the government is going to take on it, why not wait until this review is finished before they undertake the disposal of these lands?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the two issues, again as I've pointed out at the beginning, are not related. I will take his question as a matter of notice and get a more detailed answer to him and report to the Assembly at a later date.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Tradespeople's Training

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I must bring up in the House the economic resurgence in West Yellowhead, and my concern is, number one, with alternate routes for certification. My question to our minister of advanced education: are there ways other than completing an apprentice program to become or to be recognized as a certified journeyman in this province?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I can think of at least three ways that this could be done. The first is if a person comes into Alberta and is already the holder of what we call a red seal or has an interprovincial standard, then they can be quickly recognized by Alberta. The Alberta journeyman equivalency certificate is where we would have a worker, then, perhaps come from some other jurisdiction not covered by our interprovincial standards but he could show work competency or he could show actual certificates indicating that he has this particular training and then he could actually ask to be considered as a journeyman and to work under an occupation here in Alberta. Then the one that we've talked about before, this Alberta qualification certificate program: again, a person who would be seen as having hands-on work experience, has perhaps worked in a particular trade for a number of years can just simply come forward, ask to challenge the test, and he would be provided with that opportunity.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is: how do we ensure that the standards established for persons completing an apprentice program are maintained and that the person can function in a safe, effective manner?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, this gets right to the nub of this. This is a very important question. I don't want to be in any way deprecatory in my answer, but under the equivalency program a person's skill and knowledge are determined to be equivalent to those of an Alberta certified journeyman through an assessment of previous training and work experience and the successful completion of an industry examination. Now, under the qualification certificate program a person's competencies are

determined through an assessment of work experience, knowledge, and skills. Again, he asks to challenge the examination, and he must successfully complete that.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is: what are the fees with respect to the qualification certificate program?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we certainly want administration fees to apply. For prior learning assessment, which is actually quite a rigorous assessment of previous experience, and the theory examination, we currently have a fee of \$450. Now, some trades also require practical examinations, and the fee for these would vary.

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

Dental Care Coverage

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Blue Cross recently developed the dental package called the Blue preferred plan, that would offer plans at a lower cost to consumers and employer groups. In order for this to work, however, dentists would charge 12 percent lower than the suggested fee schedule in exchange for Blue Cross referring patients directly to them. The Alberta Dental Association has told its members that acceptance of this agreement may result in disciplinary action. My first question is to the Minister of Health. Will the minister confirm whether the Alberta Dental Association has the authority to suspend or discipline dentists based solely on whether they enter into the Blue preferred program?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is some question of interpretation of the legislation. It is, from my point of view, a rather unusual clause to be in professional legislation. But, yes, I would acknowledge that one interpretation of that clause might allow them to do this.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My follow-up question is again to the Minister of Health. As this is not a competency issue – it's a dollars and cents issue – will the minister provide leadership by ensuring that dentists who wish to enter the Blue preferred program are not penalized by the Alberta Dental Association?

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly I am looking at this particular clause in legislation. My preference of course at this point in time is that these negotiations result in a reasonably negotiated settlement between the dentists in the province belonging to the Alberta Dental Association, who set their fees and prices acting in I hope the interests of their customers, and likewise the Blue Cross insurance corporation, which is also acting in the interests of its customers. So I hope the overall dispute will be resolved, but certainly the point in legislation that has been mentioned is something that I am reviewing.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you. My last question is to the minister responsible for consumer affairs. What will that minister do to ensure that Albertans are able to take advantage of competitive dental plans in pricing? Is that minister working with the Minister of Health to ensure that that occurs?

THE SPEAKER: Well, the difficulty here is that the Chair has knowledge that there is no minister referred to as the minister of consumer affairs.

MS LEBOVICI: No. The minister responsible for consumer affairs.

THE SPEAKER: Well, again, that's another one of those legal entities that doesn't seem to exist anymore in 1997, but we'll assume that the current Minister of Municipal Affairs has some responsibility for some portion of what used to be in the department.

MS LEBOVICI: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Yeah. Well, clarified it anyway.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there are some questions that have been posed by the opposition that relate to the responsibilities that I have as the minister that has a portion of consumer affairs within her purview. I might say that in the matter of securities I know that is the purview of the Provincial Treasurer. In terms of any overriding responsibility related to Health, I will check and respond.

Thank you.

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

Seniors' Programs

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I received a note through my constituency staff last weekend. The note indicates that a senior living alone has a seniors' benefit income limit of \$17,000. For a senior couple the limit is \$26,000, not two times \$17,000, which is \$34,000. It seems there is more financial benefit for a senior couple to break up in order to have the higher income limit. My question is to the hon. Minister of Community Development. Could the minister comment on this?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct: there is a different threshold for a single senior and/or for couples. However, the levels for cash benefit are actually \$13,215 for a single and \$17,466 for a couple. That's for cash benefit purposes, and that does not include their income from OAS, old age security, or guaranteed income supplement or workers' compensation payments or other payments like that. That would be on top of that threshold, so obviously they are higher than those.

The area for premium subsidy on health care insurance premiums is also different for singles or couples. However, members in this Assembly should know that the cash benefits in Alberta are more generous than in any other province in Canada. In fact, we're only one of five that offer any cash support for seniors.

Mr. Speaker, why do we do this? Well, it is assumed that two people can indeed live in some ways cheaper than one: one rent for accommodation or set of taxes, utilities, and so on. Certainly I can say that it is not our intention to in any way put in place policies or procedures that would encourage anything but couples staying together, but I must remind the hon. member that when you are a couple, you are paying one mortgage or one rent or one set of taxes, not two, and the same with utilities and other things.

So that is the reason for the differential between singles and couples.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister and also related to seniors' benefits. The government encourages seniors to remain at home as long as possible. Would the government consider some property tax assistance to those seniors?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there is, I guess, a misunderstanding or a miscommunication or a lack of understanding of the development of the Alberta seniors' benefit program. When that program was developed, in fact there were three programs that were rolled into that. One was the property tax rebate program, one was the senior citizens' rental assistance program, and the Alberta assured income program. So in fact the dollars from those three programs, which I think indeed were housed in two or three different departments, were rolled into that program.

What has changed, though, Mr. Speaker, is the universality of those programs. The dollars today are committed to those seniors with higher needs; in other words, lower income seniors. So the benefits of those programs are there, but they are there in fact to respond to seniors who have higher needs through lower incomes.

The other program that's extremely important to consider in this area for seniors of high needs is the special-needs assistance program, and we have talked about that in this Legislature.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact my first question was partly answered. Seniors are on fixed incomes while the costs of living are increasing. Could the minister comment on programs that assist seniors who are in need?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I guess going back to the earlier question and trying to summarize how we deal with the Alberta seniors' benefit program and responding to seniors' needs, we understand that seniors can experience unexpected costs. We understand that their earning power is severely limited as a senior. So we introduced the special needs program that I indicated earlier. That was subsequently raised to a \$5,000 per year threshold, each person. It was at one time \$1,000 per senior couple or single.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the response to that program has been significant. It has been used for emergencies such as a roof leaking, water pipes breaking, a furnace breaking down, unexpected dental costs or health costs, high drug costs that are unexpected to a couple. It has been extremely well received and responsive to seniors.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat that Alberta has the most generous programs in the country.

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

Peace River Flood

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three days after the floods in Peace River the minister of transportation said that the downtown area would be restored to the viable place it had been. A month later two-thirds of the business claimants had not received any funds, many downtown stores are unable to open due to lack of compensation, and the government won't lift the \$100,000 cap on payments. There's been a loss of 150 to 200 jobs, and if something isn't done soon, this means serious

economic repercussions for Peace River. My question is to the minister of transportation, responsible for disaster services. Why is this government so slow in providing adequate compensation to the downtown community of Peace River?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The majority of the claims have been paid. Paid. So why would we want to actually be suggesting that this government is being slow? I'm rather surprised, shocked, and quite frankly can't understand the insinuation that comes forward here. [interjections] Disgusting, yes. Right.

Nevertheless, there are two elements that indeed the disaster program works through, and one of those elements is the \$100,000 cap. The majority of those affected by the \$100,000 cap, both in Fort McMurray and in Peace River, have actually received cheques. The area that is a problem is the small business area, and that's a federal/provincial agreement. To date I have had three meetings with federal officials. I have written to the federal minister responsible twice asking for a change in this particular element, and to date we have had no success whatsoever.

2:30

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He's stepped right into it. Thank you so much. You're hiding behind the federal government. You know that you have the ability under the provincial government, when there are special circumstances, to effect change up there, and you haven't done it. So quit hiding behind the feds. Why aren't you acting?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the question was. I heard a statement.

Nevertheless, there are two elements to this program. One is the cap, and, yes, we are responsible for the \$100,000 cap. The other is the small business element, which is a federal guideline. Why would we be hiding behind the federal guideline? I have met with the federal minister for Alberta on three occasions. I have written to the federal minister responsible for the program on two occasions asking that this particular element be redesigned to fit the needs of this particular community.

If you have two partners, Mr. Speaker, equal share in the business, they're not eligible under the guidelines of this program, and it's not right. If in agriculture, for example, you make a greater percentage of your income off the farm than you do on the farm, you're not eligible. As a matter of fact you're not eligible for any part of that program because of the federal guidelines. That's why. Because of the federal guidelines. We have appealed to the federal government for changes, and we will keep appealing to the federal government to have these particular elements changed. [interjections]

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to wake up the Assembly today. Maybe it'll help the people in Peace River eventually. Maybe I'll send the minister a copy so he can read the federal guidelines.

I'm very frustrated. Why won't you help the people of Peace River? You have the ability to do it. You help many other businesses across this province. They need some help to be viable. Why won't you help them?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a tragedy because we have a tremendous amount of hurt in a community where approximately 60 percent of the businesses have been affected in

a very, very negative way. The community is hurting and the community is suffering. My heart goes out to those people in Peace River, and indeed that's why we are making sure that the money is being paid out as expeditiously as possible. However, we have run into a roadblock in that there are certain elements of the business community that don't fit under the federal/provincial guidelines. We have appealed to the federal government and we will keep appealing to the federal government to try and get this changed.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have three members' statements today. The first will be from the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

International Museums Day

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sunday, May 18, was the 20th International Museums Day, a day set aside to reflect on the importance of museums in preserving our heritage. This year the international museum community has chosen to raise awareness about the illicit traffic of cultural property. The International Council of Museums has developed codes of conduct for museums to ensure that objects are legally acquired and that no archeological site, biological or geographical specimens are damaged in the process of acquisition. Alberta's 200 museums, including 18 provincially operated museums in historic sites, are committed to upholding these standards. Besides raising awareness of important issues affecting museums, International Museums Day celebrates these cherished institutions.

In 1995 Alberta museums attracted 6.3 million visitors, all of whom had a chance to learn about our province's natural and cultural history. These institutions not only preserve and present our heritage but employ 2,400 Albertans and generate \$67.5 million in revenue. As well, in 1995 approximately 11,000 volunteers provided services to almost 8,000 full-time jobs valued at over \$19 million.

Mr. Speaker, museums are a vital part of the Alberta advantage. Albertans should be aware that their museums, both large and small, have garnered an international reputation enabling them to beat out other major North American museums to secure top exhibits. Genghis Khan: Treasures of Inner Mongolia, now showing at the Provincial Museum of Alberta, would not have come here were it not for the high regard in which the Provincial Museum and its staff are held.

Understanding the value of museums to the economic and cultural life of the province, the governments of Alberta and Montana have entered into a joint agreement to promote visitation to museums, parks, and historic sites. A guidebook promoting these destinations will be available in June.

Today's museums are dynamic, fun, stimulating, thought-provoking, and changing all the time. Albertans are asked to watch for two new permanent exhibits scheduled to open in provincial museums next year.

Although International Museums Day happened 11 days ago, it's not too late to discover the past. I would encourage Albertans to join the many volunteer groups throughout the province helping museums fund-raise, plan events, and interpret exhibits. I urge you to go for it.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: We want Mill Woods. We want Mill Woods.

Homelessness Awareness Week

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thanks very much. Actually, I always wanted to represent a constituency that still has a hospital.

Mr. Speaker, time is short, and what I wanted to acknowledge and recognize is that this week, May 25 to 31, is Homelessness Awareness Week. Now, this is a particularly important issue in downtown Calgary, where some 13,000 of my constituents live in low-income households, in fact many of them single-parent families. So this is a particular issue, a particular problem. I'm pleased to advise all members that during this week there is a series of important events occurring in the city of Calgary to draw public attention to the issue of homelessness and I think to help remind all of us that there's no single problem and no single solution. It's actually a very complex issue with many different facets and many different dimensions.

Just to give members a flavour of what's happening, there was a luncheon hosted yesterday by the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Business Association. Today some 16 different agencies are holding open houses. Wednesday there's an interagency luncheon. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday there's a conference in Calgary in which the Member for Calgary-Bow and I will both be participating.

I think what's really important is to recognize that this is a problem where there's been a serious initiative in Calgary to try and address the problem. That's included work by the Cliff Bungalow-Mission Community Association to volunteer to contribute funds to hire a street worker. So those small kinds of steps are happening in different parts of downtown Calgary.

The challenge is going to be for members in this Assembly to be able to support and enable and facilitate those local community initiatives. Homelessness ought to be a priority issue for every one of the 83 members of this Assembly.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Senior Citizens' Week

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council I am pleased to advise you that the province's 11th annual Senior Citizens' Week will be celebrated from June 1 to 7, 1997. The first Senior Citizens' Week was held in 1986 after the Seniors Advisory Council recommended hosting a special week to promote a greater respect for the contribution seniors make to the quality of life in Alberta.

The goals and objectives of the Senior Citizens' Week are to promote positive attitudes toward and understanding of older people in our communities, to recognize the contribution that older people are making in our communities, and to provide an opportunity to honour the older people of Alberta. This special week provides an opportunity to pay tribute to all of those who have contributed to our province during their lifetimes and who continue to give so much to Alberta and its future.

In past years Alberta communities have honoured our province's seniors in a variety of imaginative ways. Banquets have

been hosted by school children, variety shows, talent nights, and people have celebrated at picnics, potlucks, and family dances.

I am honoured to have been appointed chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, and I look forward to meeting seniors from across the province and hearing their thoughts and feelings firsthand. I also look forward to reporting their views to the government in a timely manner.

In closing, I would encourage all Albertans to take some time between June 1 and 7 to celebrate with seniors in their communities.

Thank you.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: Opposition House Leader, a question you want to raise today? No. You do that on Thursday? Okay.

We have five points of order today. Five. The papers were flying front and centre. The first one, Government House Leader.

Point of Order Unparliamentary Language

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be interested in the other three. I only caught two.

I'm referring to some comments which were made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and this actually should not take long to dispose of. Under Standing Order 23(j) I believe that "insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder" has been uttered by the Leader of the Opposition. I refer to his comment to the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services when in response to a statement from the minister he said - I believe I'm accurate - "What an ignorant thing to say." Not only is that a clear breach of Standing Order 23(j), but I would also submit that is close enough to the term "ignoramus," which, according to *Beauchesne* 489, is unparliamentary. I'm not in any way suggesting that's a term that applies to the hon. minister.

As a consequence, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that the Leader of the Opposition should withdraw the remark. He should sincerely apologize for the implication of his statement, and let's just get on with it. Again, it's totally inappropriate for him to be making that remark.

I might also add, Mr. Speaker, that again today there were a number of instances where the Leader of the Opposition I think took some liberty with respect to the memorandum of agreement and was constantly adding to his comments, either responding to answers or, alternately, putting in a preamble to supplementaries.

So I would hope that he'd do the honourable thing and withdraw the remark.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I have been informed by in fact you that since 1981 the usage of the word "ignorant" is unparliamentary in this Legislative Assembly, and on that basis I withdraw my comments. I apologize to the member and I apologize to the Legislature. I apologize to you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

The second point of order, Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Anticipation

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I guess we can't go back to that one. That's okay, Mr. Speaker. There are several words that my leader didn't use that he may have used.

In any case, my point of order arises from a response of the Premier earlier in question period and an intervention in part from

the Chair. I am referring to *Beauchesne* 409(12) but only in the inverse, I suppose. Section 409(12), Government House Leader, is the section that says you can't talk about an issue in question period that is an item on the Order Paper. Of course, there was some caution to the Premier, when questions were put pertaining to freedom of information, that it might be in anticipation of Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 1.

Well, two points, Mr. Speaker. First of all, Bill 1 deals with one section of the freedom of information and privacy law. Those are the sections that deal with private colleges. There has been some broad-ranging debate on Bill 1 in committee dealing with some other amendments, but we are somewhat constrained by the government's agenda. The question, as I heard the hon. member raise it, did not deal at all with the subject matter of Bill 1 but instead dealt with a policy of the government regarding the development of a fully implemented freedom of information and protection of privacy regime in this province.

Secondly, as you are aware, the Government House Leader, quite unbelievable as it may be, stood in this Assembly at the beginning of the session and invoked closure on government Bill 1. I know the irony is not lost on you, sir, that the government would actually invoke closure on a Bill that deals with freedom of information. Besides the fact that this is very ironic, of course it would tend to limit debate. It's very hard to know what the government's next step might be, and in fact we can suppose, Mr. Speaker, that the government's next step might very well be to bring up Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 1 at such a time as the Legislature is horribly constrained for time. They may bring it up at such a time as we have another procedural deadline, such as 5:30 on a Thursday afternoon, and only allow a moment or two more debate on this very, very important Bill.

I just wanted to make it clear that there was no attempt on this side of the House to violate the rules of anticipation. We believe that it was a question that sought clarification on an urgent matter, that being freedom of information and access to that information, and it was about a government policy outside of Bill 1.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'll just say that I'll fully support whatever wise ruling you'll come out with on this one.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, you have no choice, but I do appreciate the certainty of the argument. The Chair recalls that the Chair rose after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs had raised her first question and the hon. Premier had responded to the first question. The Chair rose at that point in time just to advise that there seemed to be on the schedule of events for today the possibility of this particular freedom of information Act coming up and used the word "caution" but did not preclude the pursuit of the question, the second and subsequent questions. I think, hon. Official Opposition House Leader, probably what you were doing was rising not so much on a point of order as perhaps a point of clarification from the Speaker, and I think that was done. That perhaps was in order.

Now, at the point of the third point of order there were two individuals that basically rose at the same time, so the Chair is going to call on the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Point of Order Provocative Language

MRS. SLOAN: I rise, Mr. Speaker, under 417 and 491 of *Beauchesne* and 23(j) of the Standing Orders. I would reflect to the Speaker that I've tried to get a copy of the Blues so that I can

cite the statements made by the Minister of Family and Social Services accurately, but I have not been able to get a copy of those. So to paraphrase the language that the minister used, I believe it was inferring that the Liberals wanted to push people out of shelters or, to some degree, for the government to offer less support to people that are in need of shelter assistance.

The relevance of those statements to 417 are that that rule specifically speaks to answers being brief and to deal with the matters raised. I don't think the Liberals have a position on reductions in shelter support, to my knowledge, and I believe that the minister's intention with respect to that was more to provoke debate than to actually give a credible answer.

Beauchesne 491 is specifically relevant, because it says that language should be "temperate and worthy of the place . . . it is spoken." We were raising a question about a very serious issue, the issue of a growing number of Albertans not having shelter in the harsh environment in which we live. Again, the minister's response and the language utilized in that context in my view do not meet the specifics of 491.

Standing Order 23(j) speaks to language that is likely to cause disorder, and the minister's statements certainly did that, hon. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I don't have the wording to review it myself, but I listened quite carefully to the comments from the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services, and I did not find anything terribly provocative in his remarks. Quite frankly, it's difficult to give a credible answer in some cases when you're responding to an incredible question, and that was probably part of the difficulty he was faced with. I find most of the argument here to be a point of clarification by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview as to perhaps her party's position regarding a particular matter. I don't think there is a point of order based on what I've heard.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The Chair has the Blues to this point in time. In response to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services says the following, and I quote:

There seems to be an inherent lack of understanding going on here. What I stated is that there was a percentage, albeit a very small percentage, of the homeless people that have chosen to live in the streets. Mr. Speaker, we are spending \$14 million a year to go out and try and envelop these people, to try and help these people. If we ignore them, if we see they don't exist, such as the Liberal opposition is now saying, that is wrong.

I would tend to suggest that this is a matter of clarification, at least in point of terms of what Blues the Speaker has. Now, this is only part of the Blues that has been published to this point in time, and I sincerely hope that at least my reiterating this at this point in time has helped clarify.

Opposition House Leader, second point of order.

Point of Order

Question Period Rules

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that we've visited once or twice in this session already, and it has to do with questions from government supporters to members of the front bench. Today in question period the Premier himself referred to one of these questions in passing, that he hoped it wouldn't be seen as a puffball.

Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 409 – and I'm sorry that this may be a little tedious – reads in part as follows:

A brief question seeking information about an important matter of some urgency which falls within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Minister to whom it is addressed, is in order.

The government has a variety of obligations and a variety of responsibilities, and there are a variety of urgent matters on the minds of Albertans which any member of this Assembly of course is entitled to direct questions to to try to seek clarification. The questions pertain to an event, a political event, which is going to take place in November, not an event that's going to take place tomorrow or the next day. Some people certainly would question whether it has more to do with politics than policy.

Mr. Speaker, if I could go on to quoting 409 of *Beauchesne*, sub (3) reads, "The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis," such as the question from Banff-Cochrane. The supplemental portion read: will the government listen to the outcome of the summit?

Sub (3) goes on to say, "Cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer," as though what would we have the Premier say when asked the question: will your government listen, Mr. Premier? It certainly suggests its own answer.

Sub (4) reads, "It ought to be on an important matter, and not be frivolous." I believe that is in part the definition of a puffball, which the Premier was afraid he was being faced with.

Sub (8), Mr. Speaker, says that "a question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again." Now, I will paraphrase the Member for Banff-Cochrane. She was about to pose her second supplemental question when she said – and I believe I'm quoting properly – I think that's already been answered, but I'll ask my next supplemental anyway. If those weren't the member's exact words, I do apologize, but certainly the words were to that effect.

Then, of course, the member took some of the precious time out of question period to ask her self-admittedly redundant question, and the Premier made the situation worse. He compounded it by answering that redundant question, and he went on for some length, Mr. Speaker.

Beauchesne 409(11) continues:

A question which seeks an opinion about government policy is probably out of order in that it asks for an opinion and not information. A question asking for a general statement of government policy may be out of order in that it requires a long answer that should be made on motions . . . or in debate.

It says parenthetically "now statements by ministers." Of course, Mr. Speaker, we've talked before about the abuse of question period by members of the front bench setting up members of the backbench to ask them puffball questions so that they can use time in question period, avoid government accountability, instead of using ministerial statements, which is their purview. They can do that every day. It's on the Order Paper every day: Ministerial Statements. They wouldn't have to take up the time in question period.

This was perhaps the most offensive example of this frivolous use of question period that we've yet faced in the Assembly. It is offensive, it is costly, and it does nothing to raise the quality of debate in this House or the general level of information amongst Albertans. The government has at its disposal the Public Affairs Bureau. They can issue press releases; they can buy television time; they can use ministerial statements. They don't have to abuse question period, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I also have *Beauchesne* 409 in front of me. I'd like to indicate that initially the question was seeking information, and it seems that the opposition becomes a little confused when they look at questions which are actually seeking information as opposed to those which are simply being asked in an attempt to embarrass and not seek information. Part of the problem is that a number of the questions that are asked by the opposition, I can tell you, the front bench has a much easier time dealing with than the ones from our own caucus, because our own caucus seems to actually look at issues that are critical as opposed to simply reading the paper on the day question period happens to be happening to try and come up with the questions.

I would refer to *Beauchesne* 409(4): "It ought to be on an important matter." It was an important matter, Mr. Speaker. The Growth Summit is critical to all Albertans. It is not a political event; it is an economic event. On this side of the House we consider those types of issues to be sufficiently important to actually invite all Albertans to become involved in them.

"The matter ought to be of some urgency." It is of some urgency. Albertans are calling my office and they're calling my colleagues' offices with respect to questions regarding how they can become involved in this initiative, and they care about the direction their province is going. So I feel, again, the issue of urgency is answered.

"A question . . . within the administrative competence of the Government." Clearly, it's within our jurisdiction.

One that I found interesting that they would raise is sub (8): "A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again." I can advise you, Mr. Speaker, that on at least five occasions I've been asked the same question in this House by the opposition regarding gang-related crime, yet that doesn't seem to stop them from coming back with the same question, although I have to assume it's because they just don't understand the answer.

In any event, I think this question is entirely within the parameters of the Standing Orders. The Premier may have answered at some length, but again that's because quite frankly Albertans want to hear what he has to say.

THE SPEAKER: Arguably is a good word to use at this point in time. The Chair would like to refer all members to *Beauchesne* 408(1)(a), which states:

Such questions should:

- (a) be asked only in respect of matters of sufficient urgency and importance as to require an immediate answer.

You might also want to take a look at *Beauchesne* 410(11), which talks about urgency again.

The Chair started the response by saying "arguably." It's an interesting question, because today is in the month of May. The particular event in question will occur a number of months henceforward, so there can always be subjectivity with respect to the urgency of a question today about an event that will go into the future.

The Chair would also like to point out *Beauchesne* 410, which states under point (9):

Questions should not repeat questions already asked although this does not mean that [the] questions on the same point are out of order.

The point put forward by the hon. Government House Leader was: gee, somebody's asked me a question five times on different occasions about the same subject matter. That's perfectly acceptable. I think the point raised here today is the fact that the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane pointed out in her third

question: gee, I think you've already answered the question, but I'm going to ask it again anyway. There was a repetition of that. That was not the only occasion when that occurred today as well. There was an exchange of questions between the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort and the hon. Minister of Community Development where there was repetition, almost a summation in the third question about what happened in the first and second questions.

3:00

Again, brevity, to the point, urgency, matters of today would be helpful to everyone. It was a valid point to have been raised, Opposition House Leader.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, do you have a point of order, or did the Chair clarify it?

Point of Order Ministerial Responsibilities

MS LEIBOVICI: Yes, I believe you did. It was more of a clarification as to how to address the minister responsible for consumer affairs. Is that the proper way?

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, when Executive Council was introduced to the public, a document was put out called the order of precedence list. On that order of precedence list it ranks the various departments of government with their official name and also the responsibilities of various ministers and what they might be associated with. In the past there clearly was a minister of consumer and corporate affairs, and there was legislation which clearly identified a minister and a department of consumer and corporate affairs. That has subsequently changed. The Chair standing here at the moment does not know if there is in fact a piece of legislation which clearly relates to a department of consumer and corporate affairs. He would think not anymore, and certainly the consumer side has been shifted to one department and the corporation side has been shifted to another department.

The bottom line is that there is no minister known as consumer and corporate affairs, and it's inherent upon the hon. member who raises the question to have the correct title for the minister who is responsible for that particular agency, not to have the Chair go through the maze to try and find it. The order of precedence is the best document for all members to take a look at to see who is responsible for what. Failing that, the government of Alberta telephone book gives you the best Bible of all answers about anything associated with the government of Alberta.

MS LEIBOVICI: If I may, Mr. Speaker. It's the Minister of Municipal Affairs because the Minister of Municipal Affairs does have the consumer affairs division under her responsibility and has clearly outlined that what the division does is provide the balance and appropriate regulatory framework for consumers and businesses. So in questions that I have with regard to consumer affairs in this province, I should then address the minister as Minister of Municipal Affairs?

THE SPEAKER: Well, the Chair is not going to be totally definitive on that at the moment because his memory cannot remember if what the hon. member is saying is actually correct. The Chair would suggest that in the next ensuing minutes the hon. member open the phone book. Failing that, phone the Minister of Municipal Affairs and ask her if she is.

MS LEIBOVICI: Oh, I know she is.

THE SPEAKER: Ah, ah, ah.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. Okay.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we proceed to Orders of the Day, might we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests now?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, if your guests are still here.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: They're not, but thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had wanted to acknowledge their presence in the Chamber earlier today. Had they been here, I would have introduced to you and through you to other members of the Assembly 72 students from the Nellie McClung program in Oliver school. This is a very exciting program. It's the first girls-only junior high. Grades 8 and 9 joined us earlier today, in particular the first graduating class from this program. They were accompanied by their instructors Mrs. Jillian Madsen, Ms Christie Johnson, and the assistant principal, Mrs. Glenys Berry. I had wanted to acknowledge their presence here this afternoon.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling
Acting Presiding Officers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, one other point of clarification just prior to moving to Orders of the Day. Last evening the Deputy Speaker at one point during the evening invited the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to chair a portion of the Assembly when the House was in committee. The Speaker meets with the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chairman of Committees regularly, and in recent weeks one of the discussions was: are there individual members in the House who from time to time would like to serve in the Chair for a period of time? As a result of the discussion, the Speaker sent a letter of invitation to four hon. members who had in the past all expressed an interest in one of the positions.

So from time to time hon. members will see either the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont or the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow or the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek or the hon. Member for Dunvegan sitting in the Chair at various times during the business day. If additional members would like from time to time, as the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has in the past, to get a bit of experience chairing a certain portion of the session, we would be very, very pleased to extend an invitation to you to hone some skills and strengthen the leather on your back and improve the sharpness of your ears in this regard.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than**
head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Third Reading**
Bill 204
Provincial Court Amendment Act, 1997

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

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my

pleasure to move third reading of Bill 204, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 1997.

The principles of Bill 204 have received widespread support from interested parties in Alberta and across this country. I would like to acknowledge all those who have called me and who wrote letters expressing their support.

Mr. Speaker, while drafting this legislation and throughout the Bill's proceedings, I consulted extensively with grandparents' rights groups and parents' groups, including the Canadian Grandparents' Rights Association, the Alberta Grandparents' Rights Association, the orphaned grandparents' rights group, and the Equitable Child Maintenance & Access Society. These groups have been involved with this Bill since its inception over two years ago. Their dedication and commitment to seeing this Bill through is very much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 is a Bill that has been cultivated from the ground up. It began with discussions with grandparents in my constituency who first brought the issue to my attention. Since that time I have consulted with many grandparents across this province, addressing their concerns and ensuring that their needs are met by this Bill while securing the best interests of the child. The result is the concise and comprehensive piece of legislation that we have before us today.

Before voting on Bill 204, I would ask the members to consider very carefully what a grandparent and a grandchild can offer one another. I urge members to think back to their own special relationship with their grandparents. Memories live long in the minds and the hearts of children. I know that myself. I treasure the memories that I have of my grandmother and our times spent together, as my children have of their grandparents. Surely, Mr. Speaker, all children have the right to create these memories with their grandparents.

Mr. Speaker, we must recognize the importance and uniqueness of the grandparent/grandchild bond. Grandparents are able to provide children with a sense of their family history and heritage, with unconditional love and support and continuity in times of stress and transition. A grandparent may be the only person in a child's life that can offer such a relationship. Clearly, we cannot deny a child the right to access this special grandparent/grandchild relationship.

It is time for the province of Alberta to provide grandparents and grandchildren with the legal recourse they need to secure access and visitation rights to one another. Bill 204 will ensure that there is a vehicle in place to maintain the bond and to protect this special relationship. Mr. Speaker, the passage of Bill 204 would be only the second time in Canada that grandparents are granted access rights to their grandchildren. The Bill's proceedings have been closely followed by interest groups, governments across this country, and also media across the country and would provide a model for other provinces to follow.

Bill 204 is a Bill that grandparents across this province have been hoping, praying, and waiting for. Mr. Speaker, we have grandparents from all over the province in the gallery waiting. We have debated Bill 204. It passed second reading on May 13 and Committee of the Whole on May 20.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all the members of this Assembly to support Bill 204, because the grandparents and the children of this province deserve it.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you, and I'd like to call the question.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would just like to make a couple of comments prior to the question being called. I, too, support the legislation that has been put forward. I do believe that in the past the Alberta Liberal Party has advocated that such legislation be enacted to give grandparents the right of access to their grandchildren after separation of the children's parents. This would have been achieved under the larger Bill, the Family Law Reform Act, that we put forward, also recognizing that definitely there are relatives who may also benefit from the expanded aspect of the legislation.

However, just in support of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's legislation, I do want to say that I encourage all the members on this side of the House to support it. Hopefully, as we move down the road, we can look at a broader piece of legislation that would in fact allow aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters to also be included in that aspect of access. I would like to say again that I encourage all members of this House and our caucus to support this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

3:10

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

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I'd like to thank you, and I'd like to thank the opposition. I've mentioned before the grandparents in the gallery that are awaiting the vote of this Bill, and I know their hearts are probably pounding as hard as mine, so I'll close debate at this time and call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a third time]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than**
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
 head: **Second Reading**

Bill 207
Alberta Health Care
Accountability and Entitlement Act

[Adjourned debate May 21: Mr. Jonson]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think that when the time expired, I had neared the completion of my remarks, but I would like to just finish off two additional points. First of all, in terms of the legislation that we are considering, it is legislation which really deals with an overall approach to appeals, providing an avenue of recourse for people who have specific concerns about the health care system regarding their treatment or the treatment of a relative or a friend or some specific lack of performance that's alleged within the system.

I think there are certain inadequacies in the specific clauses of the Bill, which we can discuss when we get into committee study, but the basic point is that we have under way – we have under way – a follow-up to the recommendations of the Alberta Health Council where we are working on combining into a more efficient model the various appeal mechanisms that the council correctly identified as being very numerous and confusing to the public in this province. So we have under way, Mr. Speaker, in what I think will be regarded as a careful and well-considered way, a thorough process for addressing this particular issue, and I do not think that it would serve anybody very well to rush ahead with a

piece of legislation which is really, I think, redundant at this particular point in time and rush ahead with passing such legislation which is redundant and also has some basic flaws. The alternative, which I think is much better, that we're pursuing is that of going through a process of discussion, of development, and not delaying this either, because we do want to see this come into place, but a well-considered approach to dealing with this overall problem of appeals.

The second point, Mr. Speaker, that I wanted to make is just to repeat – I comment on this because it is not perhaps completely close to the Bill itself but may in a way be a principle involved – that we certainly are committed as a government to maintaining a strong and effective public health care system in this province and also to adhering to the principles of the Canada Health Act. We certainly are open to working with federal officials or the federal minister, as he may have concerns, and we would want him to be receptive as we might have concerns with respect to the evolution of the system.

So with those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I conclude. Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I consider it a privilege to stand and speak to a Bill proposed by this side of the House that encompasses three major objectives: the first being to outline health care rights for Albertans; the second, to create an advocate, a single advocate, not one, two, three, four, or five as is currently the case in our health care system but one advocate that would assist Albertans to deal with health care problems; and to propose the prevention of facility fees being charged for medically necessary services.

It is an odd world and system of health care that we currently live with in this province. As we read this morning, we have an esteemed physician, one who has held many posts, have to publicly advocate to get expedient care for his son in a provincial institution. We also have a case of a baby who died within the system one year ago. The parents continue to await, either incomplete or in part, aspects of three different reports that were undertaken by the system as to why their baby died. One year later and those parents are still waiting.

It is a strange system of health care that we have, where the minister daily cites the adherence and the allegiance of this government to the principles of the Canada Health Act, yet on almost every other turn is quietly and subliminally eroding those principles through aspects of their government reform. Those subliminal reforms that I have seen and witnessed resound and re-emphasize continually an increased personal responsibility, increased personal responsibility not just in health but specifically on the merits of this Bill. There is an increased reliance, particularly for women, the 51 percent of our population in this province who are increasingly relied upon to care for sick dependents, whether they be children or parents or family members. We also subliminally have seen an increased utilization of deregulation and delicensure to promote the higher utilization of lesser qualified, lesser trained staff, staff members who are given ad hoc and less than comprehensive training on site in the workplaces and very shortly thereafter are being put in positions to make, in some situations, life and death assessments of patients.

We also have seen subliminally a move away from the input of the citizens of this province into the priorities and the directions of health care in this province. I can speak from experience, Mr. Speaker. As a registered nurse I was called upon and appointed

by the Minister of Health to sit on the health plan co-ordination project. I was one of the few on the committee that opposed directives to basically define insured services. Also of interest to me, there was not a single member of the opposition on that committee, while there were a number of government-elected MLAs, and interestingly a number of individuals that – it is well known – have very close ties to the Conservative Party were present on that committee to give advice and make recommendations with respect to crucial, crucial reforms to Alberta's health care system.

3:20

Another aspect that has been continually overlooked and that continues to be denied in this House – and it is most integral in the opposition's call for Albertans' rights of health care to be encompassed in legislation – is the implications of the North American free trade agreement on our health care system in this province and in this country, an agreement which, by the way, was negotiated by a Conservative government. It was enforced, put in place in the face of much opposition and now contains rights and obligations that will replace medicare with American-style health care.

For the information of the members in the Assembly I would just like to list several of those sections. Article 1201, scope and coverage, placed all Canadian health services under the agreement. Articles 1102 and 1202, national treatment, require Canada and the provinces to accord U.S. health service providers the same treatment as Canadian providers without exception. Article 102, objectives which eliminate barriers to cross-border trade and movement of goods and services. Chapter 19 gives U.S. interests the right to countervail any or all Canadian exports on the grounds that the government financial assistance for health care is an unfair subsidy. Chapter 17, intellectual property, in effect required Canada to replace its compulsory licensing system for drug patents with the U.S. system, thereby enormously increasing medicare's drug bill. Chapter 15 erects insurmountable barriers to returning privatized health services to public ownership and prohibits recourse to dispute settlement. Article 103:2 provides that NAFTA shall prevail over other agreements, including GATT. Article 105 extends NAFTA provisions to provincial governments unless otherwise provided in the agreement. Article 1029(b) in effect obliges Canada to progressively remove restrictions that prevent you as health service providers from operating here on the same basis as Canadian providers.

Just a small list that places our system in jeopardy, in jeopardy and in hand with all of the haphazard and ill-conceived ideas that have been imposed by this government on the system. On that basis there is not a more perfect time to enshrine the health care entitlements of Albertans into our laws.

We have an obligation in this Legislative Assembly to act, to rule, and to pass laws that are in the interests of and that protect our citizens, our constituents, and our way of life. We have been to date not alive to that obligation. In fact, perhaps by ignorance and perhaps by intent, we have put a system that was once the envy of the world in jeopardy and now propose to lead it to further jeopardy by allowing a private hospital to open its doors in Calgary. HRG and the entitlements being provided to it by the Alberta government will directly be aligned with the entitlements, rights, and obligations of NAFTA. We will thereby place ourselves in a position where American and Mexican corporations offering the same services will have multiple legal entitlements to set up the same types of practices.

There is much that could be said on the merits of this Act, but

it is undoubtedly, Mr. Speaker, going to fall on deaf ears in this Assembly. We have a current government that did not have the courage during the provincial election to say that it was their intent to privatize health care, yet within 60 days of that election being held we see a corporation – and probably there are many others in the wings that we don't know about at this point in time – putting up their oak paneling and preparing to open their doors to provide the first private hospital of its kind in this province's history. [interjection] Of its kind. I believe I said, hon. member, of its kind. If the hon. member wishes to become more informed on the subject, I'd be more than pleased to share with her the information that I've utilized in my citations today.

We also have, not only within the hospital sector but within our laboratory sector, again provided provisions under the North American free trade agreement that will entitle private companies to establish themselves in Alberta. With the agreement provided to Dynacare Kasper in the city of Edmonton, we will now see firms like MDS Inc., Canada's largest laboratory services company, which has recently merged with Columbia Healthcare, also enabled to provide private lab services.

I would like to conclude by saying that it has been a privilege to have the opportunity to speak to such a Bill. I will watch with interest as the current government continues to allege that they defend the Canada Health Act and the provincial health care system, but the facts I have cited this afternoon reflect, Mr. Speaker, that that is truly not the case.

Thank you.

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 207, the Health Care Accountability and Entitlement Act, sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. Clearly, health care is the number one issue for all Albertans and for all Canadians. For this reason there has been much debate on the issue to ensure that our health care system adequately meets the needs of all Canadians and that it is sustainable in the future.

I am somewhat disappointed that the member opposite is bringing back a Bill that offers nothing new, nothing innovative, and nothing positive for the future of health care in this province. Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is to outline the basic rights of Albertans. Bill 207 declares that it is the right of all Albertans to have “universal, comprehensive health care” and that all Albertans receive

adequate, continuous and personally medically necessary health care,

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

(b) regardless of their ability to pay.

I do not disagree with these principles. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this government wholly supports these fundamental principles. They're the foundation of our health care system in Alberta. The rights outlined in Bill 207 are strikingly similar to those found in the Canada Health Act. Therefore, they offer nothing new, since Alberta abides by the Canada Health Act.

MS CARLSON: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, a point of order?

Point of Order
Questioning a Member

MS CARLSON: Yes. I'm wondering if the member would entertain a question.

MR. YANKOWSKY: We're running very short of time, Mr. Speaker, and I won't.

THE SPEAKER: Did the hon. member say he would not?

MR. YANKOWSKY: No.

THE SPEAKER: Fine. Proceed.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Just to . . .

THE SPEAKER: I hate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Provincewide Recreation Trails

505. Mr. Doerksen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to develop a provincewide plan linking trails and to encourage responsible recreational use of such trails.

[Debate adjourned May 20: Mr. Doerksen speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know you were hesitant to interrupt the previous speaker, but this motion is a very important motion, and I'm glad we're able to get on with the discussion here today. If I might ask, how much time do I have left of my speaking time? I've got eight minutes left. Thank you.

I'm continuing on without going back to all of the things I talked about last week. A couple of things happened since I gave my introductory comments last Tuesday. I had the opportunity again this past Sunday to visit Dry Island Buffalo Jump provincial park and do some cycling on the trails there with my wife and three of my kids, a fascinating park, and it underscores the importance of proper trail development.

3:30

The other thing that occurred to me. I happened to pick up a copy of *Maclean's* magazine – this was the May 12 issue – and noticed they have a full page ad on the Trans Canada Trail in this, with notable corporate sponsors: Chrysler Canada, TSN, Canada Trust, Canadian Airlines, and *Maclean's*. So, Mr. Speaker, there are people who are in fact very interested in this concept of the Trans Canada Trail. Part of the reason for bringing this motion to the Assembly is to raise that awareness among Albertans and particularly among the members of this provincial government. So I will carry on.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

The idea of having the government of Alberta co-ordinate the provincialwide trail plan will not be the first time a provincial government has taken the initiative to undertake such a project. In 1994 the New Brunswick government announced that a system of community-based multiple trail use would be developed in partnership with communities and organizations throughout the

province. As a result of that announcement a task force was established to prepare, build, and operate a provincewide, shared use, all-season trail system. The plan was to include recommendations on trail standards, trail usage, and the route. The recommendations made by that task force are now being implemented throughout the province.

Alberta would be wise to follow the lead of New Brunswick in their endeavour to create a more open and user friendly trail network. Other provinces are also supporting the trail initiative in their own ways. Nova Scotia passed an Act to provide for trails over land and water in the province in 1990. I'm not convinced that Alberta needs legislation to force a helping hand upon the trail organizations of this province, but we do need to provide our support for their initiatives.

The development of trail systems is not limited to Canada. In fact, on February 5, 1997, an amendment was tabled in the U.S. House of Representatives to amend the National Trail System Act to create a new category of long-distance trails to be known as national discovery trails. The American Discovery Trail is conceptually the same as the Trans Canada Trail in that the trail will be designed to link their coasts. I went to some length in my previous speech to indicate that on the eastern coast is the Atlantic Ocean, on the western coast is the Pacific Ocean, and of course in the north is the Arctic Ocean. The U.S. also provides a positive step in recognizing the importance of trails and does this through an American Trails Day, which is celebrated annually on June 7.

I would like to mention the trails and their relation to the Special Places 2000 government initiative. A trail network will help achieve the four pillars of the special places program. [interjection] This is where the minister of the environment is paying attention, and rightly he should. The goals of Special Places 2000 include outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation, tourism, and preservation.

I have touched upon the outdoor recreation aspect and would like to spend a minute or two on the remaining pillars of the program. Heritage appreciation and trails go hand in hand. Much of Alberta's history is based on and around trails. Are you aware of that?

MR. LUND: Yeah, I was.

MR. DOERKSEN: The trails that were blazed to open the west were great in number, and each has a specific role in our history. With the provincial government being involved in trail planning, we could ensure that these historic trails are preserved for future generations. [interjection] The former minister of economic development should pay attention to these remarks. Tourism in this province is on the rise, and creating a trail system that joins all corners of Alberta will only ensure that tourism will continue to be a great revenue source for local communities and constituencies.

Trails are a hot item these days, be they for hiking, walking, biking, skiing, or snowmobiling.

DR. TAYLOR: Bird-watching.

MR. DOERKSEN: Madam Speaker, the fit members of this Legislature certainly agree with my initiative. The ones who are used to sitting around with their – never mind. We'll carry on.

Madam Speaker, surveys conducted in the United States suggest

a trail user spends on average between \$7 and \$25 U.S. per day on clothes, equipment, food, gas, lodging, and souvenirs. The greatest benefits will flow to those who live nearest to recreational corridors. The financial rewards for Alberta communities cannot be ignored.

Preservation also forms part of the goals of the Special Places 2000 program, and trails will do much for the preservation of Alberta's unique areas. The concept of trails is twofold. Firstly, they're there for recreation, and secondly, they allow us to be closer to nature. Albertans are very environmentally aware and would appreciate the government's effort to be involved in the planning of trails and to set the standards for trail development and maintenance. This will ensure that our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy the natural beauty of Alberta as we do today.

I believe that the lead for planning needs to come from the Minister of Community Development, with close collaboration from agriculture, Economic Development and Tourism, and Environmental Protection. Madam Speaker, Alberta's trails need to be created in a wise and insightful manner, and as a proponent of trails I would be glad to volunteer to chair a task force to co-ordinate and review trail planning and responsible recreational use of trails.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I would like the members of this Assembly to support this worthy cause. Motion 505 is the beginning of a stable trail system in Alberta that many generations will be able to use and enjoy. I believe that trails are a facility whose time is now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak to Motion 505.

MR. DICKSON: And we're happy to hear you.

MS CARLSON: Thank you.

The motion is "to develop a provincewide plan linking trails and to encourage . . . recreational use." It was quite entertaining to hear the Member for Red Deer-South lecturing the Environmental Protection minister and the former economic development minister about how important this linking of the trails is and how they should be paying attention to what he was saying and endorsing it. It's interesting that he would have that kind of a focus and say that this motion has that kind of an emphasis when in fact it appears on the Order Paper only as a motion. He's talking about this motion and that he's not convinced that the legislation is actually needed for this, and I guess that's why we see it come before us as a motion as opposed to a private member's Bill or as opposed to the Minister of Environmental Protection having sponsored it as a Bill of his own. I'm wondering, then, what the mandate of the government is in terms of actually supporting this. Are they going to be giving just some lip service to the support of it? Or are we going to see some concrete action in terms of the direction we're going to go in terms of fulfilling our portion of the Trans Canada Trail?

This government is a little behind in terms of getting onside with this project. While they may have been saying within the department that it's a good project, we've seen other provinces, which includes New Brunswick, having come forward with

official support and some form of legislative support as early as 1994. Perhaps there'll be an opportunity for the Minister of Environmental Protection to address this particular issue.

There might have been something that I've missed over time, but I haven't been able to find any specific support that's come before the House in terms of this. I think it is the responsibility of the province to co-ordinate a provincialwide trail plan in this particular instance. I think in some instances, particularly when we're talking about competing sources for the actual source of the trail – that's in terms of private users or municipal users who for whatever reason are not ready to link up on the trail – the province has an active role to play in that regard.

3:40

I'm also wondering why this comes forward as a motion when we've seen a similar kind of private member's Bill come forward here and why the government hasn't linked all of these pieces of legislation in a manner that would be easy to endorse by people on both sides of the House and therefore have a strong voice at the table in terms of the kind of environmental umbrella that needs to be talked about in this province.

There's no doubt that this trail will accommodate a number of uses. I think that's a positive step forward. I think that's what people are asking for. There's no doubt that it will link up some areas that I think will be designated in Special Places 2000 now, but I would like to get confirmation from the minister that in fact these acres that will be dedicated in terms of the trail will not be counted in terms of the overall Special Places 2000 package, because I don't think they meet the minimum requirements. Now, he can clarify that for me, but I think that linking one area to another is not nearly the same as a specific designated area. Special Places 2000 to my way of thinking is something to accommodate not just the environment and the need for green areas but also things like wildlife corridors and areas that can maintain the natural heritage of the province. An actively used walking trail or cycling trail or snowmobiling trail will certainly be in competition with wildlife for anything other than just basic passage and may be too narrow to accommodate them. So I'm hoping that before this motion comes up for the vote, the minister will stand up and address those issues from a clarification perspective.

I'm wondering why we as a province didn't come forward with a more comprehensive program like the New Brunswick system. It could be that there is an emphasis and an expectation that Trailnet in Alberta will provide this kind of plan. If so, it's just a matter of clarification on my point. What New Brunswick came up with was a strong overall partnership organizational structure that clearly laid out the expectations on behalf of the provincial government, as a partner, and the New Brunswick Trails Council Inc., which would be the equivalent of Trailnet here, and then local trail sponsors.

The Member for Red Deer-South talked about the corporate sponsors that are involved on a Canada-wide basis. I'm wondering if those same sponsors are going to be area specific in terms of either the province or specific regions within the province. Perhaps that's a point of clarification that someone can talk to us about. Are the local trail sponsors here in this province going to do more than sponsorship? Will they be helping to identify trail routes? Will they be involved in supervising the construction of the trails and in maintenance, which is what we're seeing occurring in other provinces? So I would appreciate some answers to that question.

Exactly where are we on the status of abandoned railway right-

of-ways? It seems to me I recall that there are some lines that are going to be up for sale or available or have just recently been sold, particularly in the northern part of Alberta. Is Trailnet actively pursuing those? Do they have the budget to do that, or is there some sort of shared-use agreement with existing railways who are giving up lines or with current landowners who are using those lines for something other than railways? I'm hoping that those questions will be addressed for me.

Having said that, certainly I support this motion. I think it's a step in the right direction. I wish it would have come through as a Bill as opposed to a motion, which would have given it a little more concrete support.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm glad to be able to stand today in support of Motion 505. The concept of a trail system is not new in this province, and the need to create a plan for our province will benefit Albertans and organizations such as the Trans Canada Trail and Alberta's own Trailnet.

Madam Speaker, there have been many comments made on the positive aspects of trails, and I agree with many of them. I have heard mention of the health benefits, the financial benefits, the productive use of Albertan lands. There was also brief mention by the Member for Red Deer-South regarding the historic past and the historic aspects of trails.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take a few moments and talk about Alberta's history as it relates to trails and trailblazing. The traditional use of trails by the native population was to move from hunting ground to hunting ground, depending on the seasons. These trails were barely perceivable and not well marked, but through tradition the locations of these trails were passed on from generation to generation.

As the early settlers entered Alberta, they used trails for trade, settlement, and exploration of the west. Many of the trails used by both aboriginals and new settlers are now paved over or girded with steel. There is often a great sense of nostalgia when we think of Alberta's past and its association with trails.

I would like to relate the history of one particular trail in the southern part of the province that greatly affected the settlement of that area. I speak of the Fort Benton/Whoop-Up Trail, said to have been both a warpath and a commercial route for more than 200 years. This trail has been known by a few different names, the Fort Benton Trail and the Old North Trail. The Whoop-Up Trail was in fact just a portion of the Old North Trail, which itself has quite a past. It's believed that the Old North Trail spanned the length of North America, following the Rocky Mountains. There was also speculation that this trail some 30,000 years ago saw nomads crossing the land bridge across the Bering Strait and southward along the Continental Divide. The Old North Trail may have in fact led to the first settlement in North America. Such a trail certainly deserves to be protected, and with a provincewide trail plan we would be able to identify segments of the Old North Trail to be protected for purely historical reasons.

Madam Speaker, the small section of the Whoop-Up Trail which I would like to talk about had extended use from Fort Benton, Montana, to Fort Whoop-Up, at the confluence of the St. Mary and Oldman rivers, southwest of present-day Lethbridge. The history of this trail contains stories of murder, whiskey traders, wolfers, hide hunters, and fur traders. The Whoop-Up Trail saw whiskey being traded for furs, and by the 1860s

whiskey was the prime trading commodity. Whiskey forts soon opened all along the trail in hopes of gaining some of the bounty that others were attaining. These whiskey forts, Madam Speaker, were full of deceit and corruption, and Fort Whoop-Up was perhaps the most notorious of them all. Perhaps that explains the reputation of Lethbridge to this day. The fort itself was built by J. Healy and A.B. Hamilton, both from Fort Benton.

It was partially because of the lawlessness of this Fort Whoop-Up Trail that the Canadian government formed the North-West Mounted Police. This semimilitary force was put together to quell American expansion into Canada and to bring law and order to the west. The first set of troops was sent to Alberta because of the infamous Cypress Hills Indian massacre in 1873. This massacre saw 30 innocent Assiniboines killed by white wolfers, who were allegedly searching for a band of natives accused of stealing their horses. The troops were sent to strategic points throughout Alberta to stop illegal trading and protect Canada's borders.

Of the three troops sent to Alberta, one was led by Colonel James Macleod. Colonel Macleod was going to set up the first headquarters at Fort Whoop-Up, the source of much of the trouble. However, when he arrived, the fort was deserted. They moved onwards and set up the first police headquarters on an island on the Oldman River. It became what we know now as Fort Macleod.

3:50

Madam Speaker, there is much history in the south of Alberta, and it is for the historic reasons that I strongly support establishment of the provincewide trail plan. We owe it to the aboriginal populations, the original settlers, and the scarlett and gold, the North West Mounted Police, to ensure that this history is never forgotten.

Alberta is in a unique position in that it has the opportunity to be the co-ordinator of interest groups, the general public, and various government agencies to see the creation of a trail plan that would benefit all of Alberta. The government is able to hear both the pros and cons of creating certain trails and helping to create a solution to the concerns that are raised. This is a government that is accountable to Albertans, and having the provincial government take a leading role in Alberta's trail development will ensure that all voices of Albertans can be heard.

The reason I mention all voices is in concern for the multiple uses of trails. Over the last week or so the *Edmonton Journal's* letters to the editor page has run letters regarding the use of trails by hikers and mountain bikers. There seems to be a great deal of concern over the destruction of the local landscape by mountain bikers and the lack of understanding on the part of hikers. I do not want to choose sides in this debate, but the fact of the matter is that there are at times conflicting uses of trails. With provincial involvement it would be possible to identify these problems and concerns and perhaps lead to a viable course of action to reduce or curb these problems. The government would be able to have a co-ordinated effort so that all sides of the trail issue would be able to have their voices heard rather than snippets read in a daily newspaper.

Well, Madam Speaker, I'm sure you can appreciate that there are times in this House when for one reason or another members are asked to speak on behalf of other members. The speech that I have just been going through was in fact prepared by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. Much of the rest of it deals with issues that are very specific to his constituency, and with the permission and I'm sure the support of all members I will leave those parts of this speech to that member. I'm sure he can speak

much better on behalf of his constituents than I can. Much of it deals with the issues of snowmobiles, and I'm sure you can imagine that the use of snowmobiles isn't one of the more popular winter pastimes in sunny southern Alberta, where we get no snow.

I would like to make a few personal comments on the issue of trails, because I think it's important that all members understand what the philosophy is behind this motion and why they should support the motion. What the Member for Red Deer-South is asking is that we have some kind of a co-ordinated effort co-ordinated by the province, not necessarily funded by the province but co-ordinated by the province, so that the various groups that are working around the province, interested in putting together a network of trails, have some kind of a body that they can look to at least to bring the various factions together. I think it's very important that that take place.

As the Member for Red Deer-South has pointed out, there are occasions when some groups don't necessarily have the ability, whether it be the organizational ability or in fact the financial ability just to deal with the organization. We're not talking about capitalization here. We're not talking about construction of trails. We're only talking about putting together the co-ordinated effort that it takes to bring all the various groups together.

Frankly, I think that this is an ideal opportunity for this Legislature to support something that's very positive for the province. I certainly do encourage all members to support this motion. I think that it would give a chance for the various groups around the province to get together under some kind of an overriding umbrella and work out some of the issues that have been plaguing the whole issue of trails for some time. Quite frankly, I think there are a number of issues. I'm certainly not here saying that all of the problems will be solved, that everything will go away if we were to put some kind of a task force or some kind of an umbrella organization together, but at least we'll get all of the various people talking together and working together towards what I think is a very positive end, and that is perpetuating a system of well-organized trails across the province of Alberta.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me real pleasure this afternoon to stand and speak on Motion 505. I will be speaking in favour of this motion. I think it's a real opportunity for us to initiate or to build on a program right now that would leave a real heritage for our children and grandchildren in this province.

As we go about trying to remember from an historical perspective a lot of the things that have gone on in our province, this can best be done if we can identify some of the channels, some of the transportation networks, some of the community involvement focal points that are part of our history. As we get involved in dealing with trails and as people go out and participate in these kinds of recreational activities, it also contributes very significantly to the sense of family, the sense of community, the sense of good health that comes with exercise, with doing things together, and with getting involved in terms of learning both about our world, our environment, and the family members or the friends that we're traveling with. So this is really an important part of how we should be looking at this proposal to provide a planning network,

a planning system that can be put in place to help develop this provincial trail system.

We've heard a lot of suggestions in terms of how this might be done. Some of the things that we want to look at are the impact of dealing with things like abandoned rail lines or other abandoned public properties in the sense of possibly some of our local municipal roadways that are now being kind of taken out of active use because of sparsity of population and that. So we can get into all kinds of discussions, but one of the things that we need to look at is how we can deal with these in the context of keeping a trail attractive, keeping it interesting so that people will actually use it and get involved with the activities that may be available along it. So we've got to have this kind of broad planning perspective.

You know, I think it's an interesting situation that this motion is up at about the same time that we're talking about changes in things like the Occupiers' Liability Act. We can go towards reassuring Albertans that if they voluntarily participate in these kinds of programs, they're not going to be ending up in a position where their wealth, their investments, their lifetime's work can be put in jeopardy by having someone come along a trail, wander off onto their property, have an accident, and then end up being the instigator behind a lawsuit so that we end up then with the individual having to deal with that kind of repercussion of their generosity in allowing us to build a trail.

So I think this whole package has to be put together, and, Madam Speaker, that's where government has to come in. We have to have this co-ordinating aspect in any kind of a plan to build a trail, but we don't want to make our trail plan so dependent on government that it has to be done by government. I think that we can deal with this from the perspective of getting our provincial infrastructure, our provincial Legislature involved in this kind of activity but not to the point where we undertake capitalization of it or funding for it. This should be left to the volunteer groups. I think that Alberta Trailnet right now has started a really great program in terms of some of the information materials they're putting out, some of the community meetings they're having, some of the excitement that they're getting started in certain communities to help develop their little trails and the networks they want to put in place. This whole idea of the trail across Canada is really an exciting thing.

I had an opportunity for a while to live in the eastern part of the U.S. and participated in some of the trails they had running through the Appalachians there, and it was just great fun to go through some of those areas where they had these trails. Some of them are set up so that you can participate in a motor vehicle. A lot of them, the really exciting ones, were restricted either to bicycles or foot traffic. This was really kind of nice, because you got off into the nature areas where it was quiet. You just had the occasional other person to deal with as you walked along the paths, Madam Speaker, much like walking through the river valley here in Edmonton in early morning or later in the evening when it's really very quiet and quite a relaxing type of activity. So this is a really good idea. We want to make sure that these kinds of options are put in place.

4:00

One of the members opposite talked about some of trails that are spread across southern Alberta already; you know, the Red Coat Trail. These to date have been lined up in conjunction with roadways so that people can travel them and follow them with their vehicles. But this idea of having a footpath or a bike path to look at these trails provides us with a lot more opportunity to be realistic, because a lot of these historic trails dealt with

movements much closer to the waterways so that they could have access to campsites, access to the wildlife that congregated in the river basins, the creek beds so that they could get, you know, their needs supported on a daily basis. This allows for a much more exciting trail for people to follow.

So I think that if we deal with this from the perspective of having government involved only as a facilitator and a co-ordinator in kind of a what-can-we-do-to-help function and let some of the private groups get involved in doing the actual legwork that's associated with developing the trails, doing the negotiations with landowners that have to be brought onside before the trails can be developed, I think that's the kind of thing that we've got to instill community pride in. Then we get, you know, the community buy-in that comes with: this is our trail; this is our part of the trail; we're going to keep it up; we're going to make sure that it has activities on there that make it exciting both for the visitors that come to the community and the members of our own community who want to use it.

You know, the city of Lethbridge has had an excellent program in place for walk paths and bike trails through the city. You can now get on a bicycle or take a walk and basically walk anywhere you want around the city of Lethbridge. Somebody was telling me that they trained for marathons and that they've got a route on the trails through the city of Lethbridge that's 18 miles long. From their own home they can start and end up back at their home on these trails. Well, this is the kind of community that really is important. If we can get these to be linked together so that people who want to take a longer vacation might take a trail by bike or even a hiking trail and go from, say, Lethbridge up through the pass into B.C. or follow the Red Coat Trail over to the Cypress Hills into Saskatchewan.

We heard reference earlier to the Whoop-Up Trail. Madam Speaker, I had a chance on a couple of occasions to follow part of that. It's really exciting. A lot of times you look around and you say: well, we can't see anything. Still, in your mind you're participating in something that was historic, and you really have to deal with it from that perspective so that you end up getting to feel part of our heritage, so that you feel, you know, close to some of the experiences that our ancestors felt when they came to Alberta.

So I think that this is the kind of activity that would be very nice if we could start off and make it part of, you know, Alberta's 100th birthday celebration, have this design in place so that we can then start and have communities get excited about building their part of the trail as part of their commitment to our centennial. From that perspective I think it's important that we look at this in terms of the positive impacts that it can have on our communities.

Madam Speaker, with that I'd just like to encourage everybody to think seriously about this, and possibly, if it's within their expectations of the kind of Alberta that they'd like to have, the kind of communities that they see us living in, they would support this, because I think it's a really good idea.

Thank you.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise just to make a few brief comments, perhaps five or six minutes if the Assembly will allow, regarding this motion which, basically, proposes to develop a provincewide plan linking trails and encourages the recreational use thereof.

Let me say at the outset that I am fully in support of this

motion, and I congratulate the Member for Red Deer-South for having brought it forward. Madam Speaker, it comes somewhat on the heels of a private member's statement that I was privileged to make in this regard last year in the Assembly, specifically, on May 7, 1996. I'm happy to see the member pick up on that and take it to the next step, and I congratulate him again for it.

I just want to emphasize that this notion of a cross-Canada trail is something that began as a project, Madam Speaker, I think in 1992 or thereabouts. It was a project of the 125th birthday celebrations of our country. As an integral player in our nation I think it is very incumbent on our province to take some initiative and even some leadership in this area and help fulfill that dream.

There is a great deal that has been said about the beautiful environment that we enjoy in this wonderful province: the tremendous outdoors; the natural landscape, that we all enjoy; the beautiful wildlife that can be seen along the way. As we're contemplating this cross-Canada trail type of network, I know there are important organizations that have been and continue to be involved in it. My specific involvement over the last few years in regard to this issue was with the Alberta Trailnet Society. This association is comprised essentially of volunteers who are very committed to delivering on the national dream that was first enunciated a few years ago. To date I believe we have somewhere close to 6,000 kilometres, well over 5,000 kilometres anyway, of existing trails in our province that link up urban areas with rural areas, go through certain parks. A lot of them are seeking additional extensions, which in my comments last year related to the consideration of some of the abandoned railway lines, which seem to lend themselves very naturally to this type of activity.

I know, for example, that we have an extensive plan in place that takes us from the Cypress Hills interprovincial park in the south right through to the Dinosaur provincial park in Drumheller. We have linkages through Calgary, and we're going west through Cochrane, Canmore, Banff. In fact, there were something like 13 municipalities that were involved a year ago, and I suspect that many more municipalities have come on since. This still is the type of outdoor activity that I think probably most Albertans would appreciate having as one of their choices.

I fully support the idea that we also look at some of the historic trails that are already in place, hon. member, so that we can maximize not only the great outdoors for the recreational benefit and the fitness benefit that is there, but at the same time there's, shall we say, an educational component built in, anything along the historic trail such as the Victoria Trail here in Edmonton and other locations like that. I think there's something to encourage a lot of our youth to become involved in in a very meaningful way. That, I think, has some spin-offs that go back to the classroom, which would encourage the trail usage and at the same time allow teachers to blend in something of an educational benefit for the children. You know, it can be a fun thing as you're going through the Dinosaur Trail, for example, or the Cypress Hills or, as I've said, here along the Saskatchewan River. So I would hope that the government will look favourably on this motion, Madam Speaker.

4:10

I would just conclude by saying in fact that I do have in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek either an abandoned or soon-to-be-abandoned railway line that might well be eligible for this type of usage. In fact, there was some consideration being given over the last couple of years to converting that old railway line into an extension of the Whitemud freeway through my constituency. That didn't come to pass for whatever reasons, but

perhaps it could be looked at again now for a different purpose such as proposed in and through this Bill.

We know that these trails are a multi-use type of trails. Walking and jogging I think are the two most popular outdoor recreational activities. Perhaps hiking is rolled in there as well. So in addition to walking and jogging, of course, these trails have tremendous potential for hiking and for cycling and for numerous other uses, I suspect, and I would again encourage all members to vote in favour of this motion.

The final comment I would make is with regard to preserving some of the natural beauty of the landscape that these trails are going through. I know very serious endeavours have been made in that regard, and I believe that rather strict guidelines have been put in place and followed by groups like Alberta Trailnet and others in accommodating those guidelines and at the same time keeping them what I would call danger free. I'm sure the hon. member has probably looked into some of those issues and will be apprising the builders and the entrepreneurs that will become involved in that regard.

The other thing to do with the risk-free or danger-free type of trails has to do with the issue of occupiers' liability, which I believe the member has already heard about. So I will not reiterate that. Suffice it to say that occupiers' liability is a concern to some of the people who called me about this issue after my private member's statement last year and even as we lead into this motion today.

So with those few comments, Madam Speaker, I will take my space. I again express my thanks and congratulations to the member for bringing this issue to our attention.

[Motion carried]

Career Counseling in Schools

506. Mrs. Burgener moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review in conjunction with stakeholders the role, function, and responsibilities of school guidance and career counselors at the junior and high school levels to ensure Alberta's students can make informed decisions about entering postsecondary institutions or the workforce.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the opportunity today to open debate on a motion that I have a great deal of commitment to and one which, in my personal opinion, holds the key to some of the successes for the future of our province. I bring it to your attention, and for those who haven't had a chance to review it in detail, I'd like to just put in context some of the issues I want to discuss today and also set the tone for the debate that will ensue over the next hour.

Madam Speaker, there is a strong awareness that our educated workforce is the future of this province, and that has been spoken to on a number of occasions and events that have occurred as we look at our economic development. We know that we have an increase in employment and that job creation and successful job creation of full-time employment is at an all-time high. One of the things about this whole issue is the fact that our youth unemployment figures continue to reflect a very, very difficult trend, and in fact our dropout rates continue at an unfortunate rate. I want to bring to your awareness that the Fraser Institute in fact this summer will be doing some work on our youth unemployment.

At the same time, Madam Speaker, our students continue to return for upgrading and specific training at an increasing rate. In fact, those are very costly initiatives, for often those students are now in situations where they are supporting families or working part-time. So job retraining and repositioning can be an expensive element for our students. In addition, we know that there's an incredible success rate in our small business and entrepreneurial programs. This is an incredibly good human resource strategy, and we have to be able to encompass a way of making our young people aware of small business and entrepreneurial programs.

This issue began to galvanize for me when I was doing a workshop with a number of high school students at their annual convention. The question that was asked is a common one, and many of us are still asking ourselves today: what do I want to be when I grow up? That's a challenge for many, many young people. They're often able to articulate things that they know about: I want to be this or I want to be that. They have a sense of profession; they have a sense of occupation. What often is missing is: how do we get from here to there? How do they take the skills and talents they have and translate them into appropriate choices and programs?

I want to give you two examples briefly. One was a young student who identified that he did want to be a teacher when he grew up. I asked him, "What would you do in order to become a teacher?" He was able to map out very strategically: I have to finish high school; I have to enter university; I need these types of courses; I have to take this kind of credit requirement, and ultimately I will be able to be a teacher. Then I asked him the question, "Well, what happens if there's no teaching there when you get there?" He looked at me quite blankly, and I asked him if he had considered the changing role of education. Was he aware of where job retraining might take his profession? Did he have an understanding of virtual classrooms? His vision of teaching was restricted to what he knew from his classroom experience.

Another example is a young student who had an ambition to play golf. It was something he quite liked. I met this young gentleman at the launching of an entrepreneur program last week in Calgary. He had organized in his business plan an arrangement to do golf tours, and when he revisited his golfing plan, he determined that it was actually a better idea to arrange golf tournaments. So he developed a business plan and worked, co-ordinating with the restaurant community, to develop golf tournaments as a way of recognizing employer satisfaction, bringing the employees onside, and developing a whole network with respect to the restaurant industry. At age 25 or so he now has a full-time job arranging golf tournaments. As I sat with a number of business executives, they wished they had the same job skills in order to create their careers at such a young age.

When you take those two examples – a young person completely able to be flexible and take opportunities and trade on his talents and another one who through no fault of his own had no vision of where his professional career might take him – you see where the dilemma of this whole issue sits. I want to make it very clear in this discussion that we're not at any time in this debate or in this motion attempting to cause any negative aspirations toward our current programs. Those have been fixed in place for a number of years, are under constant review, and they deal with a number of issues that are still very important to the development of our young people.

I'd like to bring attention to a couple of those initiatives in

order to give a context to what our young people go through and what is available to them. Recently, in December of '94 the Calgary Catholic board of education tabled a document reviewing the role of their guidance and counseling programs. Madam Speaker, in that process they divided out three domains where attention was to be focused. One was on career, one was on education, and one was on personal and social domains. In the structure of the document I want to just focus briefly on the career domain, because I think the others speak for themselves. When they talk about how jobs might be different in the future and what skills might be available and how to explore nontraditional careers – and again this is not a negative connotation – the who and the where providing this information is 90 percent restricted to the teacher and the classroom. While they do have employment opportunities and career days, et cetera, the focus is really on identifying the skills of the young people, and the responsibility for doing that rests quite rightly with the teacher.

4:20

Another document that I'd like to bring to your attention is the Alberta guidance counselors' working document. They have a very extensive document that looks at some key areas of focus. Each one of these groups has a role to play in this initiative, and they include students, parents, teachers, school counselor, principal and administrative team, the actual school council, the community, and the school board. So you can see that they have looked at a very holistic approach to bringing our young people into an awareness of where they might want to be as they proceed in their education.

What's missing from that particular document is any reference to an understanding of the workplace. I think that is where we are beginning to see where the weakness in the process exists. I would identify that in the career counseling model that is available through this association in Alberta, they actually recommend a master's level of training in career counseling. That counseling component is set with the ability to engage young people in understanding their skills.

I'd lastly just like to reference a document that comes through the Alberta Teachers' Association. They have a brochure which is entitled Education-Business Partnerships. In that document, Madam Speaker, one of the concerns I have is that they have a resolution which says:

Be it resolved, that the Alberta Teachers' Association urge Alberta school boards to refrain from establishing education-business partnerships to compensate for inadequate provincial or local funding for education.

Now, I understand the agenda that they're coming from on this one, but I really have difficulty with their ability to reflect on where their teaching profession might want to move when there's a negative connotation of directing students and school boards to move in an area where we have a very, very successful history of partnership.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of the House, lest they think that a lot of work hasn't been done on this, that recently the Royal Commission on Learning that was reviewed in Ontario – and I hold up for you the short version, which is still close to a hundred pages long, and bring your attention to a section on career counseling and development. They have a number of initiatives that they have focused on, and I'd like to bring to your attention that we're now moving down the system, because they're talking about elementary school teachers, understanding that in Ontario their system goes from K to 8, and their high school system is 9 to 12 with their grade 13 program after that.

MR. SAPERS: And prekindergarten, because they believe in ECS.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you for that wise, wise statement.

The elementary school teachers should have regular access to a "community career co-ordinator" responsible for co-ordinating the school's community-based, career-awareness curriculum, and working with teachers in the community; that beginning in Grade 6 or 7 and continuing through Grade 12, all schools have [properly] trained and certified career-education specialists to carry out this counseling function; that the Ministry, in co-operation with professional career-education groups and representatives from career colleges, postsecondary institutions, business, and labour develop a continuum of appropriate learner outcomes in career awareness.

So it's not just a question of developing skills, Madam Speaker. We're actually looking at developing an awareness of careers that are in the public domain. Lastly,

that the Ministry of Education and Training clarify the nature and function of personal and social guidance counselling in schools by:

- a) redefining the appropriate training required for a guidance or personal counsellor, and creating and implementing a plan for educating and re-educating those people who are now, or should now be, delivering these services to students.

Madam Speaker, the reason for drawing this to your attention is to see, first of all, that in this extensive review that was done in Ontario the shift has moved to bringing this awareness into the elementary school process and also that they are going from skill development within the student to actually understanding the career market. The reason I bring this to your attention is that we know that at the national level the Conference Board of Canada quite a number of years ago developed a very, very integral document with respect to skill training. Young people have come to be aware of the fact that they have opportunities through their education to look at certain skills, and these then become the employability skills that are the things that our employers are looking for. They include academic skills, teamwork skills, and personal management skills. I think the reason that's important is that this really does reflect the social issues that do come through our career counseling and guidance counselor models that are here today. What I want to emphasize is the need for our young people to understand that those skills are portable, that they can apply them to positions, and that they have to learn where the jobs are so that they learn where to take these skills in order to maximize their own future happiness and prosperity in the province.

I can give you an example of a conversation with respect to a student who had completed an English degree. I don't know that I've mentioned this before in the House, but in talking about the strength of an English degree, somebody said: well, why would you ever go to school and take that instead of a science degree? But the skills that are available to that young person or anyone who completes that course include the ability to critique, to do policy review, to research, to write. Madam Speaker, those are skills that have direct application in a number of areas of employment in our economy today, but it was always looked at as just an English degree, with a very narrow focus on studying literature, the comparative use of language, the ability to develop argument,

the ability to present and critique material. If you look at the career ads and you look at the number of components of an employment ad that's available, those skills are readily marketable. But we have not identified to young people not just what their skills are but where the employment opportunities are going to be in the future.

Madam Speaker, that brings me to the work that we're doing in government. Clearly, Advanced Education and Career Development's People and Prosperity human resource strategy has identified the need for a more expanded knowledge base of skills, and we know that our young people, when they reach the workforce, have become more familiar with that. We know that our schools and colleges and technical universities are all looking at strengthening our human resource strategy. Not only is it because we want to strengthen the opportunities for our young people; it is a very costly process to be in a postsecondary situation without the appropriate prerequisites or, even worse, without the focus and direction that might have been better served had the student had the opportunity to expand and investigate those. We know that Education and advanced education do work together with our guidance counselors in promoting initiatives in career awareness, but I'm not convinced yet that the thorough job has been done.

Madam Speaker, we know that the first year of university is no time to start making a decision about a career. It has to be seen in an overall context and in a step-by-step process. Where is it a better place to start your career planning than in your younger grades, when the whole world is open to you? We can't afford to use space in our postsecondary institutions on remediation and the costly concerns about credit transfers when students have to make other choices.

Madam Speaker, from initiatives with respect to the apprenticeship program and some of the issues that were spoken to by the minister today – skill development and a number of our initiatives that we have – we know that our young people are not streamlined into those programs in a positive way early on in their career. Yet from work experience we know how positively they feel when they've been moved into those particular realms of study. On behalf of those students we have an opportunity to make an initiative here for families who may not feel comfortable with their students moving into a trade initiative or a technology-related initiative that doesn't have the aura of profession around it.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to say just briefly before we conclude our debate this afternoon that the CALM program that's available does raise a lot of concerns with our young people. Yes, it has some important elements to it, and I know it's continuing to be revised. But I can tell you from personal experience that a number of young people that come through our home have asked that we take a second look at that, because it is not able to fulfill its current mandate in light of the current changes that are available in the workplace.

I would like to touch briefly on the Alberta Growth Summit and the opportunity today to start fleshing out for our young people the attention they should pay to that particular initiative. Certainly in my constituency of Calgary-Currie our area youth summit, that we are in the process of planning, is the first step in bringing a very strong focus on where young people fit into the jobs and sustainable strength of our economy, that is the vision of our Premier in the Growth Summit that will be developed later in September.

I also want to encourage . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Third Reading**

4:30 **Bill 3**
Colleges Amendment Act, 1997

MR. DUNFORD: On behalf of the hon. member, I'd like to move third reading of Bill 3, the Colleges Amendment Act.

MR. SAPERS: I'm surprised that's all the minister has to say about this very important, historic Bill.

Madam Speaker, there are increasingly fewer and fewer opportunities that I have to stand in the Assembly and support a government initiative. This Bill is pretty darn good. I just wish the government had taken the opportunity, when they were opening up the Colleges Act, to take a look at the most vexing issue of the discretionary powers of the boards of directors of colleges when it comes to designating who is and isn't a member of professional groups or faculty associations. The minister is aware of legal challenges in this matter. There are some opportunities that we have to sort of look into the future – and this is one of them – where we can see this becoming more and more a problematic area. So while the Assembly has the opportunity to deal with the Colleges Act in the government's initiative under Bill 3, it just would have been nice if we'd had a chance to deal with this issue as well.

MR. DUNFORD: Maybe next time.

MR. SAPERS: The minister advises: maybe next time. I'm going to take that as being as close to a promise from the government as Albertans can expect, and I look forward to that "next time" somewhere over the rainbow, Mr. Minister. [interjections] Oh, they're now qualifying it with the maybe part, and pretty soon it'll just be a vicious rumour. Then there'll be a press release saying that the Liberals are fear mongering about colleges.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

So, Mr. Speaker, the debate will continue. We will support Bill 3 at third reading, and I look forward to the minister bringing back this legislation for some real serious work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It's most kind of you all to remind me of the question. The only thing is that having just shifted into the Chair, I'm not sure whether we have Bill 2 or Bill 3. Bill 3. Okay.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Bill 12
Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 1997

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 12, the Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 1997.

I'm really pleased with the support from the multitude of stakeholders, from the multitude of parties in this Assembly in supporting this very important amendment Act and supporting the benefit to all Albertans and all Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BARRETT: I'd love to be the MLA for two ridings, but I can only handle one at a time, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Highlands. I beg your pardon.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll probably be the first member of this Assembly to speak against parts of this Bill. I wish I could have done so before, but I found out the hard way what it's like to have a caucus of two. I don't know how Grant Notley and Ray Martin did it by themselves, because everybody wants a bit of you and you can't always get to the Leg. [interjections] Well, it's true. It's true. There are meetings constantly. [interjections] You want to get rid of me. [interjections] Oh, okay. I should have rephrased that.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, I wonder if we might let the hon. leader of the ND opposition party get on with her address at third reading of this Bill, and I wonder if the member would do that.

MS BARRETT: On a point of order, I probably provoked it. But I never provoke debate in question period, so I am exonerated. [interjections] I didn't hear any objections from you guys. What kind of pills did these guys take today, Mr. Speaker?

There are two problems with this Bill, Mr. Speaker. Number one, there's a disturbing trend in this government to increasingly put power in the hands of cabinet at the expense of the Legislature, the difference being that the Legislature is where public policy should be debated by members of all parties, representing 83 constituencies, as opposed to a handful of cabinet ministers. You know, I understand this so-called concern for real transfer of regulation from legislation and that it's supposed to be in the name of housekeeping. I don't buy that. I see a disturbing trend in this sitting itself. Mind you, it's not very different from what I've seen in the last 13 years at the very least, maybe longer than that. You'll see provisions for that in a number of sections of this legislation.

Number two, I'll just point out that I'm talking about the formula that's listed on page 27 of this Bill. You know, at first glance you might think: gee, you have to give something to get investment. Sometimes that is true. However, I just recently heard the minister of community services say, when I made a bid to her to bring back the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation, that this government does not believe in providing incentives for economic development. I had been making the case that if we had an agency that was out there actively marketing Alberta for the development of motion pictures, we'd get more and more of that industry out of Hollywood, which is now not into big productions on its own. All the best productions are done by the independents, and they'll go around the world. They will go to places like British Columbia, where there are minor tax incentives.

Now, if that's the government's philosophy, I do not understand why in this new formula we suddenly see – what is it? – 43 or 45 percent, what amounts to capital cost acceleration. That is unheard of in any industry. Furthermore, perhaps it is appropriate to provide for a substantial increase in the royalties on the new project to help compensate for the capital infusion that Athabasca Oil Sands Trust are infusing. Maybe it's fair, but I'm not convinced that it's fair to give them both this massive capital cost allowance and a massive reduction in royalties to be paid. Well, first of all, I don't like the numbers. It's too generous, period. Point blank. It is too generous. Number two, why you would want to lock yourselves into a seven-year period is beyond me. In the third place, I don't understand why there isn't some kind of promise by the company to, for example, create jobs, make a pledge to buy Alberta first. If that includes the purchase of manufactured products, so be it.

These are Alberta's resources, Mr. Speaker. They don't belong to the government. This government got very lucky, very lucky indeed because of a little fight caused by OPEC in 1973. Any government can sit on a pool of resources like this and spend money. Well, I don't like the inconsistency of the government's policy when it comes to industrial development. If you're not going to provide incentives to get a motion picture industry here – and very tiny incentives, I might add. What did the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation cost? My recollection is that the maximum was \$16 million a year, and that was at the height of its expenditures. Now, if you're going to have one policy for one area of industry and not for another, I say that is inconsistent. I also say, more importantly, that it's inconsistent when it comes to the subject of a depleting natural resource, even though I acknowledge that the oil sands do have a very long life compared to conventional sources.

Something else that the other opposition party seems to have missed is that the value of the oil from oil sands is much higher than the value of west Texas crude. I don't know if people know that, but it's consistently between \$4 and \$6 a barrel higher. So why is it that this company – and I will give them credit for going for this expansion. It's important. It's good in the long run, although maybe the environmentalists would disagree with me. Yeah, they would. I don't understand why we would want to provide such a handsome incentive when in fact the value of the oil sands oil, previously subject to admittedly a somewhat checkerboard royalty regime but the same royalty regime that conventional oil drillers and companies were obliged to pay, is consistently \$4 to \$6 a barrel higher than conventional sources.

4:40

By the way, I don't know if anybody ever noticed or bothered to say anything, but that's one of the major reasons that the government had misled the province and the people of Alberta for the last four years. They kept saying that they were going to have a balanced budget, and they kept saying, "Oh, we're going to be realistic in pegging our royalty revenue to the conventional oil prices," when they knew darn well that a lot of our royalty revenue was coming from oil sands sweet oil, which is a more refined product and fetches a higher price on the market.

So like I say, I might be the only MLA to speak against this Bill, but I do so. I don't suppose anybody's going to call a standing vote, because I'm just one vote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
 head: **Second Reading**

Bill 10
Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 1997

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce for second reading Bill 10, being the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 1997.

Since the Local Authorities Election Act was last amended in 1990, it's been working well in most areas. However, as with all legislation, we've received requests for changes. After much consultation with various stakeholders and recently again with all of the municipalities, we're introducing amendments which will provide a better and more effective Local Authorities Election Act for all Albertans.

MR. SAPERS: Could you speak up, Madam Minister?

MS EVANS: Nobody's ever complained of that before.

The Local Authorities Election Act determines who is eligible to run for local office, who is eligible to vote in a local election, how elections must be run, and how public and separate school board residence is determined. The Act also sets out fines and penalties for offences. This government believes that the concerns and priorities of Albertans are often best represented by the level of government closest to them. The Local Authorities Election Act directs the conduct of elections at the local level.

Most amendments being introduced today have been recommended by the various stakeholders. These amendments include allowing for the creation of a permanent voters list at the discretion of the municipality, allowing a municipality to pass a bylaw to accept nominations at more than one location, making the fines and penalties under the Local Authorities Election Act consistent with the Election Act, adding two or more categories of voters who will be eligible to vote at an advance vote, providing further clarification and technical amendments to improve the efficiency of the Act.

On the permanent voters list, this will give flexibility to municipalities. Currently a municipality can choose whether or not it wants to prepare a voters list, and this will not change. However, these new amendments will allow a municipality another option to consider when preparing a voters list. A municipality can continue using the existing procedure for preparation of the voters list, or it can enter into an agreement with the Chief Electoral Officer for Alberta to receive information that will assist the secretary of the municipality in compiling a permanent voters register.

This permanent voters list will be strictly protected to prevent misuse of confidential information. Fines of up to \$100,000, imprisonment for a term of not more than one year, or both a fine and imprisonment for such misuse will be embodied in the legislation.

The existing legislation also states that nominations can only be received in one place. This is not always practical. For example, in a municipality the size of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, a potential candidate would have to travel to the Fort McMurray location to file his or her nomination papers. In some cases this would mean extensive travel. The amendment would allow a municipality the flexibility of deciding where and at how many locations the nominations would be received.

As I've stated, the fines and penalties, which have not been reviewed for a number of years, are being made coincidental with

the Election Act and, where appropriate, have been amended to be consistent with that Act.

This amendment also adds two additional categories of voters authorized to vote at an advance vote. Now all "seniors who live in a seniors' accommodation facility where an institutional voting station" is provided will be authorized to vote at an advance vote. As well, persons "who for religious reasons are not able to vote on election day" will be allowed to vote at an advance vote. In the date set for local elections this coming year, it would not be possible for one religious sect to vote if we do not permit them to do so at an advance poll.

Clarifications and technical amendments. Finally, Mr. Speaker, the clarifications respond to a number of concerns raised by the stakeholders. These address technical and administrative concerns such as making the requirement for publishing notices consistent throughout the Act, repealing certain sections and words no longer necessary, clarifying the eligibility for refund of a candidate's nomination deposit, allowing for joint elections between local elected authorities where the boundaries are not contiguous, allowing a municipality the option of providing a template for use by a blind voter, and allowing the returning officer to have more responsibility for administrative details.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the major areas of change that Bill 10, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 1997, would address.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. Thanks, Madam Minister, as well for speaking up. I appreciate that.

There's an irony attached to this Bill, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal Party of Alberta went through the last campaign vigorously putting forward the notion that regional health authorities should be elected in their entirety. Not only is that the right thing to do because it's democratic; it was what Albertans told both us and the government during the consultation on regional health authorities.

So we have a Bill now that in large measure is the mechanics of being able to elect regional health authority members, albeit only two-thirds of them, although that's not in this Act. That would be subsequent amendments to other legislation. The irony is that this is the Bill that would allow for the election of regional health authority members, and I'm finding myself in the position of it being very difficult to support this Bill but certainly not the notion behind this Bill.

When the Legislative Assembly was presented with the Regional Health Authorities Act in its first form, there were several deficiencies in that Bill, and the government quite appropriately said: look; let's roll up our sleeves and work out these deficiencies. As you will recall, Mr. Speaker, the result of that was to bring in more pages of amendments than the original Bill itself. We made that Bill better, still not perfect but better, and I'm hoping that we can have the co-operation of the minister to do the same with this Bill. This is a very, very important purpose, the election of regional health authorities. We have to do it right. The Local Authorities Election Act of course is the vehicle to accomplish this. But Bill 10 may not serve the government's interests or the people of Alberta's interests in the way that it's been contemplated.

We'll have time at committee to go through the section-by-section analysis, so I'll sort of restrict my comments at this stage

to some of the general concerns we have. This would allow the minister, I hope, to sit down with her departmental officials, and perhaps once we get into committee, we can begin the dialogue about how we're going to address these concerns.

The first one that I have is the idea of this voters list. While I fully, fully support the idea that we'll have a permanent voters list and that this list of electors may be of similar form right across the province, the fact is that this Bill fails to do two things. It fails, first of all, to harmonize the electors list with the newly harmonized provincial/federal electors list. We've just gone through some time and trouble and expense to put together a harmonized list at the two senior levels of government. It would make sense to at this time start working with the local authorities, the municipalities, local elected boards to deal with a harmonized list right across the board.

There are several reasons for this, particularly when you're dealing with local authorities' elections. You know, you have the possibility of a summer village doing an enumeration of some sort or another, and because of a different form of rules that might be used in one summer village versus another summer village or one summer village versus a municipality or a municipality versus the province and the federal government, you could have somebody appearing on a voters list more than once with very little remedy. I'm not suggesting that there would be fraud; I'm just suggesting that it would be possible to be enumerated, quite innocently, twice because there was no attempt to link these permanent voters lists together. So I would like to see some government action on this matter.

4:50

The second reason why I have difficulty with that. You know, it's fine to suggest that every local authority should have the ability to determine its own way of recording the voters list, but the problem is that when you're talking about something like electors lists and you're talking about a province now where people are highly mobile, it seems to me that you're setting yourself up for some problems if you don't prescribe either in the Bill or by regulation a standard form of preparing this permanent list of electors. So those are the two concerns about the list of electors, at least initially.

Now, there's an existing section of the local authorities Act. It's section 31. Now, section 31 is being amended by Bill 10 to accomplish some things, but it's not being amended in another way, and it's this omission that I'm most concerned about. As I understand the authority that's presently in the Local Authorities Election Act, if there are insufficient nominations for any local authority to fill the vacancies that have been prescribed, then the minister responsible – so if we're talking about regional health authorities in this case, the Minister of Health – could make whatever change is necessary to that local authority to deal with that situation of the absence of sufficient nominations. That's the existing power under the Act, as I understand it. Now, if I've misunderstood this existing power, I would like to be informed about that.

Mr. Speaker, what this means is that if there are insufficient nominations in one health region, the Minister of Health could collapse that health region into another health region where there were enough nominations and thereby on the eve of the election create a brand-new local authority. Now, it could be that this is not the intent of the government, and I'm not suggesting that it is. I'm aware that the hon. Member for St. Albert is chairing a committee that's looking at the realignment of health boundaries.

MR. WOLOSHYN: No, she's not chairing it.

MR. SAPERS: Not chairing it. I'm informed from across the floor that she's not chairing it. But she's on it. Mr. Speaker, let's have the record reflect this: I am aware of a government task force looking at the realignment of regional health authority boundaries.

That process is ongoing, but the government should not allow this anomaly to exist in law, where the minister would have this power. The minister could also under this section of the Act say: well, there aren't enough nominated people to fill the vacancies; therefore, I will alter the circumstances for this particular health region by declaring that there will only be appointed board members. That's another possible resolution. Or the minister could say: I'm going to alter the circumstances for this particular health region by saying that we'll reduce the number of board positions to whatever the existing number of nominations may be. This of course may change that 2 to 1 ratio of elected versus appointed board members. So the way the legislation is written presents just a whole host of problems that I'm certain the government would like to avoid. I look forward to the explanation as to how these problems will be prevented.

Now, the next point that I have is the whole area of joint elections, which is contemplated in the Bill. The way that Bill 10 is written, it just simply reads that one elected authority may make a deal, make arrangements with another elected authority to hold joint elections, but it doesn't really say who comes to the dance first. Is there a senior local authority in this case? In the Edmonton region would it be the city of Edmonton that would have to initiate the proceedings with the Capital health authority? Is it the Capital health authority? Could two health authorities get together and exclude a municipal government in holding a joint election?

With the Capital health authority this is particularly interesting. We have the situation here, of course, where Sherwood Park is now part of the Capital health authority, but as the minister is aware, Sherwood Park has a proud tradition of having its own municipal level of government. I'm not sure that the people of Sherwood Park would necessarily like to see that tradition breached somehow by the city of Edmonton imposing a new sort of regime over how the citizens of Sherwood Park would vote or not vote.

Not only do you have this question of who pops the question and who initiates the debates or the negotiations; you also have nothing in the Act – and of course we don't know what the regulations may contain – that talks about how you resolve disputes. Where are the conflict resolution mechanisms for these joint elections if things can't be worked out? Further, some of the regional health authorities, as we know, have within their jurisdiction a dozen or more other local authorities. What happens if in the WestView region you have some agreement between Hinton and Jasper but not between Devon or Stony Plain? How do you resolve who takes care of the enumeration? Who's the returning officer? Who would own or who would hold this permanent list of electors and for what purpose? There's just a whole host of these kinds of procedural and technical things that arise when you look at that section on joint elections.

Another problem that could come up with joint elections is the question of filling vacancies and the cost should by-elections need to be conducted. If the regional health authority works out an arrangement with one local authority and they hold the joint election with all of the other municipal elections in October of a

particular year, the legislation would permit a health authority that has a vacancy, as I understand it, to hold a by-election for that vacancy at some other time. Again, we could take a look at the people of Sherwood Park. Would that be fair to them, to be forced to participate in a by-election? Should Sherwood Park bear some of that cost of conducting that by-election?

Again, Mr. Speaker, there's just a whole variety of questions that clearly aren't addressed in the legislation and need to be. I think that the people of Alberta and the other local authorities would want to know these answers.

I've talked a little bit about conflict resolution and dispute resolution, but there's another problem that brings us into conflict, and that is the privacy implications of this legislation. I did hear the minister say that there are new penalties being contemplated for the breach of privacy provisions of the Act. There is a particular section in the Bill which says that this information can only be used for the purposes of local authorities' elections. Fair enough. But we have a Privacy Commissioner and a law in this province that protects the personal privacy of Albertans, and that Privacy Commissioner has under that law the ability to conduct a privacy audit. If we are going to be opening up the whole process of creating new lists of electors, a new permanent voters record, it seems to me that this is the perfect time to engage the Privacy Commissioner to do a privacy audit on the implications of having various forms and methods of conducting and holding and transmitting these lists of electors.

I'm certainly not clever enough to think of all of the various ways in which the privacy and confidentiality of Albertans may be breached. The Privacy Commissioner, on the other hand, is charged with being clever enough to figure just that question out, so it would be incumbent on the minister, I believe, to at least seek the advice of the Privacy Commissioner in this regard and see whether or not this would serve the people of Alberta, to conduct a privacy audit as we are going down this path of changing the way in which local authorities compile their lists and transmit them.

5:00

There are some other problems, Mr. Speaker. The Regional Health Authorities Act and regulations do not make it really clear under this new regime of a hybrid board – you know, two-thirds elected democratically, one-third handpicked by the government – how the chair would be selected. Under the Local Authorities Election Act it doesn't make it any clearer. It doesn't tell us whether the table officers of a regional health authority will be elected under this Act. It doesn't tell us whether or not the minister will have to his discretion still the selection of chair.

As I understand it, it was the minister's decision to hang on to that power to handpick the chairpeople of each one of these regional authorities, however many there may be, but I'm wondering whether or not the desire on the part of the minister to hang on to that power comes into conflict directly with the spirit of the Local Authorities Election Act and in fact the opening comments of the minister when she introduced the Bill at second reading, where she said that the best government is the most local government. It seems to me that if the government believes that, then they would have the Minister of Health relinquish his stranglehold on the selection of chairpeople, and they would have the chair democratically elected, if not as one of those two-thirds of the board which the government is allowing the people of Alberta to choose, at least once the board itself in its entirety is in place, then have an election amongst the board people for their own chair. That seems to me to be much more in keeping with

the spirit and the intention of the government.

Finally, one of the concerns that I have that I hope to discuss more completely at committee stage and perhaps with government amendments or with our own amendments – and I'm looking forward to an opportunity to get together to sort of hash this out. Who is it that is eligible to run under this Act? As you know, Mr. Speaker, the government prohibited medical doctors and registered nurses, amongst others, from being appointed to the handpicked regional health authorities. Now, that didn't seem to be an absolutely pure prohibition, because there is a medical doctor in Fort McMurray who was handpicked to sit on one of these boards. But the fact is he doesn't bill Alberta Health, so he was permitted to be appointed. There are retired or nonworking registered nurses who were also handpicked and appointed, and in fact the current minister of social services was appointed as chairman of the . . .

MS EVANS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Point of Order Relevance

MS EVANS: This is a Local Authorities Election Act amendment. I believe that what the hon. member over here is talking about is the appointment of certain people to regional health authorities. That has absolutely no relevance.

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

MR. SAPERS: Sure. Well, I didn't hear the minister quote a citation, but I'm assuming it was *Beauchesne* 459, relevance, and I'm sure she meant to say that.

The minister's own words, I think, betray the fact that what I'm talking about is particularly relevant to the Bill. The minister said that this member is talking about the election or appointment of regional health authority members, whereas it's got nothing to do with the Bill. But if you read through the Bill, there are numerous cases – and I haven't counted them, but I bet you there are two dozen cases – where the amendments specifically insert the words “regional health authority.” So the Bill is primarily about the election of regional health authority members. The minister said that in her own opening remarks. How could this discussion about the one-third/two-third split and who's appointed and who's elected not be relevant to a Bill that creates the mechanism by which you would elect regional health authority members?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, with that explanation that within the Bill are references to regional health authorities, it would seem reasonable that the hon. member in dealing with the Bill could make references. Unless the minister is going to apprise the Chair of some exclusion of the regional health authorities from the amendments in this particular Bill 10, then the Chair would be inclined to agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. So, hon. minister, this has nothing to do with regional health authorities.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, what I said was: “allowing for joint elections between local elected authorities where the boundaries are not contiguous.” So in actual fact, to make it quite specific,

I did not mention by name – and I think *Hansard* would bear me out – regional health authorities.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't referring to the minister's comments. I was referring to the contents of the Bill, which is what we're talking about. We're talking about Bill 10, not the minister's opening comments.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: As the Chair has heard the discussion on the point of order of relevancy, the minister has indicated that the hon. member was not being relevant to Bill 10 because he was discussing for a period of time the regional health authorities and their election and their appointment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora in defence of his talking about it indicated that within this Act there is provision for the election of local health authorities.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, certainly that's obvious, but I think what the hon. member was getting into was whether a doctor would be appointed, a nurse would be appointed, et cetera, et cetera. That was my chief objection.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, if that's the matter of relevancy, then we are talking about how one gets on to the regional health authority and that this provides for how some of them may get on. I would presume from what the hon. minister has indicated that we're talking about the election. However, when you do have an Act and it does pertain to that, then you have a bit of a door opened there for the hon. member to address that.

Hon. Member for Dunvegan, if you could be with us for a while.

In relationship to the amendments that this Act contains, I think we would presume that the hon. member would deal primarily with the elections. You have dealt with the appointments, but I don't see that you're in fact out of order.

Edmonton-Glenora.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. I regret that this exchange actually just ate up some time, because my point, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the minister, is really quite simple. What I was saying is that the prohibition against appointing doctors and nurses is presumed to be a section of the existing Local Authorities Election Act, in fact section 22(1)(j) of the existing Act. I saw the minister shaking her head to the contrary, but I see that now she's looking at the existing legislation. That is the Local Authorities Election Act, which is being amended by Bill 10.

The local authorities Act was the authority cited by the government to permit them to not put health professionals on regional health authorities. I said that that wasn't an absolute prohibition, and I used the example of Dr. Nickerson in Fort McMurray. I was about to use the example of the Member for Bow Valley, because prior to that member being appointed to Executive Council, he was a practising medical doctor and chair of the standing policy committee on health restructuring. So there wasn't this complete prohibition about having medical professionals involved. It seems that some could, some couldn't. So my question to the minister at this point is: since we are amending the Local Authorities Election Act, could we not also amend the Act to deal with this inconsistency, the inconsistency being that some doctors and some retired nurses have been appointed to boards in the past?

I would hate to see, Mr. Speaker, the situation where the government would have for itself the privilege of handpicking a doctor or a nurse or another health provider to fill one of its one-third of the regional health authority board vacancies yet prohibit Albertans from democratically electing in the other two-thirds a nurse or a doctor or another health professional. This would be a very undemocratic and arbitrary act on the part of the government, and I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would not want to be party to that.

5:10

So my point is: would the minister consider, while we are amending this Bill, getting rid of that inconsistency? Could we please give permission to all interested Albertans, particularly the most knowledgeable Albertans, to serve the people of this province by being active members of regional health authorities whether through appointment or election regardless of their professional designation?

Mr. Speaker, your ruling of course was very prescient in that you anticipated why my comments were relevant, and I appreciate that, and I'm sorry if I wasn't coming to my point soon enough to suit the minister. I hope that now it's clear to her as well as to all members how these items feature as we're discussing Bill 10.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise after listening to the exchange between the Minister of Municipal Affairs and my colleague, because I also was going to raise and refer the minister specifically to section 22 of the Local Authorities Election Act, (1)(j), which provides "in the case of a district board election". If we go back and look at district board, they're talking about a district hospital board. Now, what's interesting is that in section 10 it appears that the draftsman has gone to the trouble of making a substitution of section 1 – I'm looking at Bill 10, section 2(c), where "a district as defined in the Hospitals Act" is now replaced by "a health region under the Regional Health Authorities Act" – but the draftsman chose not, for some reason, to address the situation, the disqualification provision in section 22 in the Local Authorities Election Act. So I'd want an explanation from the minister in terms of why that is, because currently

- (i) . . . a physician and a member of the medical staff,
- (ii) . . . a dentist and a member of the medical staff or dental staff, or
- (iii) . . . an employee
of a hospital or nursing home

is ineligible.

I might just say that it's interesting that if one turns over and looks at the Local Authorities Election Act, under the next provision, section 22(2)(h), a lawyer who does work for a hospital authority – as long as his or her solicitor/client account is taxed under schedule C of the Rules of Court, that's not a basis of disqualification, but a health care worker is disqualified. It's curious that this definition of a district board wasn't changed in section 22. That was omitted altogether from Bill 10. So it does beg, I think, some important questions, and I'm hopeful that either the Minister of Municipal Affairs or the Minister of Health, who has a direct interest in how we're going to elect members to regional health authorities, will clarify that provision.

I would go further and say that if you have a registered nurse

or a physician on a regional health authority – rather than an absolute prohibition, there may be a way through early disclosure, there may be some other things that can be done to avoid a conflict of interest situation. It just seems to me that if we can find a way that lawyers who are on a permanent retainer to the Capital health authority would not be ineligible to be elected to the Capital health authority, surely we could find a similar way that if you had a public health nurse, if you had a physician in the Capital health region, that person similarly would be able to be eligible. It's a question of laying out the circumstances to allow that to happen.

I have a number of concerns in terms of the permanent voters list, and I guess the first one is a more philosophical issue. I just say parenthetically: Bill 10 is an amendment Act; there's no statement of principle. We have simply a very disparate set of changes to the existing Act, so I'm going to roam a little further afield because I think I'm afforded that latitude in the absence of any kind of statement of purpose in the Bill.

We have this provision for a permanent voters list, but it's entirely at the discretion of the municipality. It just strikes me as being curious. If you go back and listen to all of the reasons why the provincial government was anxious to embrace the joint venture with the federal government to have a federal/provincial joint electors list, why, when we get to the municipal level, do we say that this is simply at the discretion of the municipality?

When we start talking about elections, we talk about the right of electors, and it's not the right of the city council any more than it is the right of the provincial government. It's the right of electors, and to paraphrase a former Provincial Treasurer, there's only one elector in the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. There's only one elector. That same person votes municipally, provincially, federally. So maybe what we should be doing is doing a bit of a paradigm shift. What we should be talking about is: if Albertans have a right to be part of a permanent voters list, maybe that's something that shouldn't be an opt in, opt out provision for municipalities. Because municipalities aren't sovereign – only the Legislature, the provincial government is sovereign – maybe we simply mandate that. The government has shown no lack of will in other circumstances to mandate things, and because here we're talking about a basic right of Albertans, maybe it should just be a mandated part of the Act and not an opt in, opt out sort of thing.

Now, the other concern. If you look at section 14, which would create the new section 48, in the provision for the permanent voters list, a couple of things jumped out at me when I looked at it. The first one is section 48.1(2). The municipality may enter into an agreement with the Chief Electoral Officer to receive information that will assist in compiling or revising the permanent electors list. What's interesting here is that the Alberta Chief Electoral Officer is bound by certain constraints in terms of what can be done with the information. It's much looser in the proposed new section 48.

Let me give you an example, Mr. Speaker. Section 48.1(3): this would be the new provision and part of section 14 in the amendment Bill. What we've got there:

In addition to the procedures, forms and methods prescribed by by-law under subsection (1), with respect to compiling and revising a permanent electors register, the secretary may use any other information obtained by or available to the secretary.

Now, that's not possible at the provincial level. The Standing Committee on Legislative Offices spent a great deal of time and effort in 1995-1996 determining very specifically what kinds of

databases could be accessed to prepare the provincial voters list. I know that my colleague from Mill Woods will remember that we went around that. Can you access health records? Can you access motor vehicle records? Which of the data sources can you go into?

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Now, in this new Section 14 there's absolutely no stipulation. It doesn't even require that the information be lawfully obtained. So if the municipality wants to deal with a direct marketer in terms of getting information, they can do that. It would seem to me that if municipalities ever become subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, one would expect that there would be some limits in terms of what kind of information could be used. That's not something that should be spelled out by way of regulation. That's something we ought to define in the statute.

The other thing that I found interesting is that some penalties have been increased. If we look at page 12, we see section 29. The proposal is to amend the penalty in section 121(1) from \$1,000 as a maximum fine to a new maximum of \$5,000, but there's no penalty for misuse of personal information relative to the new voters list. This is a startling oversight given the amount of time and effort that's been spent at the provincial level to build in those kinds of safeguards. Here we find no safeguards. What it means is that the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton or Fort McMurray can go out and they can access information from any source they can think of or that lands in their lap. People may, in fact, misuse or abuse personal data about citizens in those municipalities, and there's no price to be paid. There's no penalty. I think that's frankly not responsible.

If one looks at section 15(b) . . . [interjection] Yeah, we're almost at the end of time, Mr. Speaker, but I just want to . . . [interjections] We take enthusiastic receptions whether we get them at the beginning or at the end of the speech. [interjections] Exactly. Exactly, hon. Minister of Education.

It seems to me that section 15(b) on page 7 doesn't . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: This isn't committee; this is principle.

MR. DICKSON: It would seem that some ministers don't get it yet, Mr. Speaker. There are no principles in this Bill. It's an unprincipled Bill, and that's why I prefaced my comments earlier by saying that I was going to jump around a little bit.

If we look at section 15(b), I think that there has to be some qualification of that section because it's simply too broad as it stands.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 10.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 10 at this time. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]

