

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Tuesday, June 10, 1997 1:30 p.m.

Date: 97/06/10

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. The prayer today is taken from the Legislature of the Northwest Territories.

Let us pray.

Our Father, may Your spirit and guidance be in us as we work for the benefit of all of our people, for peace and justice in our land, and for constant recognition of the dignity and aspirations of those whom we serve.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I am giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 36.

I also give notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, and 41.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

### Bill 31 Provincial Agencies Continuation Act

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce a Bill being the Provincial Agencies Continuation Act. That's Bill 31.

Mr. Speaker will remember that provisions have been put in place for all agencies, boards, and commissions to be reviewed and sunsetted by the year 1999 unless special legislative provision is made for the continuation of those particular agencies, boards, and commissions. So this Act will deal with that specific item.

[Leave granted; Bill 31 read a first time]

### Bill 32 Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 1997

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a Bill being Bill 32, the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 1997.

This Bill will deal with situations related to the transfer of the pension plan and employees related to the sale of Telus, also some provisions for the special forces pension fund, and some other related items.

[Leave granted; Bill 32 read a first time]

### Bill 33 Alberta Treasury Branches Act

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 33, the Alberta Treasury Branches Act. This being a money Bill, his Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this Bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Leave granted; Bill 33 read a first time]

head: **Statement by the Speaker  
Private Members' Public Bills**

THE SPEAKER: Prior to this next segment, hon. members, which is the introduction of private members' public Bills, I'd just like to make the following statement.

The Chair would like to clarify for members the numbering of the second set of private members' public Bills, which are being introduced today. The second set is comprised of nine Bills: Bills 211, 212, 214 to 219 inclusive, and 221. There will be no Bill 213 introduced as the Member for Calgary-Currie, who held this position, has withdrawn her request. There will be no Bill 220 introduced as it was the Chair who held this position prior to being elected as Speaker. Parliamentary Counsel are now accepting Bill requests for members holding the positions for Bills 222 to 231 inclusive.

head: **Introduction of Bills  
(continued)**

### Bill 211 Cost Declaration Accountability Act

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 211, being the Cost Declaration Accountability Act, this afternoon.

[Leave granted; Bill 211 read a first time]

### Bill 212 Loan Brokers Act

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 212, being the Loan Brokers Act.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 212 read a first time]

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

### Bill 214 Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1997

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 214, being the Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1997.

[Leave granted; Bill 214 read a first time]

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

### Bill 215 School Amendment Act, 1997

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 215, being the School Amendment Act, 1997.

[Leave granted; Bill 215 read a first time]

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

### Bill 216 Recall Act

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being Bill 216, the Recall Act.

[Leave granted; Bill 216 read a first time]

**Bill 217**  
**Pharmaceutical Profession Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 217, being the Pharmaceutical Profession Amendment Act, 1997.

This Act proposes that a conscience clause be included in the Pharmaceutical Profession Act.

[Leave granted; Bill 217 read a first time]

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

**Bill 218**  
**Domestic Abuse Act**

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 218, the Domestic Abuse Act.

This is proposed legislation which has been brought before this Assembly before. A great deal of work has been done on it, and I thank everyone for their input to it.

[Leave granted; Bill 218 read a first time]

**Bill 219**  
**School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1997**

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 219, being the School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1997.

This amended Bill would prescribe standardized courses of study in computer technology.

[Leave granted; Bill 219 read a first time]

**Bill 221**  
**Gaming and Liquor Commission Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Gaming and Liquor Commission Amendment Act, 1997, Bill 221.

This Bill would do the honourable thing for Albertans and rid this province of VLTs.

[Leave granted; Bill 221 read a first time]

1:40

**head:                    Tabling Returns and Reports**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I wish to file with the Assembly today some documents related to questions yesterday from the Member for Edmonton-Glangarry regarding collection and protection of seniors' income information. I am filing an open letter written by the Information and Privacy Commissioner dated January 29, 1997, which summarizes the findings of his review of seniors' privacy issues, and a news release issued by the commissioner on February 4, 1997, which also discusses those findings. Both documents describe the 24 recommendations from the Commissioner, which were all accepted and implemented.

I have also written a letter to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the final supplementary question, which I do apologize that I did not hear clearly, and I have answered it in that letter to the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today

to table four copies of the Safety Codes Council annual report and four copies of the Alberta Labour Relations Board annual report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table four copies of an academic study from the University of Calgary entitled Why do Schools Differ in Achievement Test Results? It draws a direct correlation between family income and the success of children in school.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table six copies of the response to Written Question 7, as was agreed to by this Assembly on May 14, 1997.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of a letter from a constituent opposing Bill 209.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of a letter written by the staff of Kenilworth school in my constituency. The staff in this letter outline in detail their opposition to Bill 209.

Thank you.

**head:                    Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to the House some very special guests today. We are honoured to have with us four senior officials from the government of Ukraine. The leader of the Alberta delegation, Mr. Cherenkov, is a Member of Parliament and represents the Ukrainian Standing Commission on Finance and Banking. The delegation is in Alberta to explore our model of taxation, public expenditure management, and federal/provincial fiscal relations. This study tour is being sponsored by the Canadian government under the Canada/Ukraine legislative co-operation project. Through discussions between senior government officials in Alberta and Ukraine, a greater understanding of our two countries can emerge for future economic and commercial co-operation. I'd like to extend our visitors my best wishes for a productive and memorable stay in Alberta. I'd ask that our honoured guests stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 60 visitors from Lorne Jenken high school in Barrhead who are seated in the members' gallery, and I believe some may be in the public gallery. Included are teachers or group leaders Mrs. Joy McLean, Mr. Spencer Moon, and Mr. Allan Shipton. Would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two constituents from the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake constituency, John and Donna Ellerby. They're in the members' gallery. They're here to witness the proceedings of the Legislature, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 27 visitors from my riding. They are members of the Airdrie Koinonia Christian school accompanied by Mr. Calvin Heinrichs and Mrs. Dorothea Hopf and teacher Mr. Paul Holmes, who, when he was doing his time in the public system, was also my son's teacher. Would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly nine students from Austin O'Brien high school in my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are accompanied today by Nereo Bolzon, a teacher and former student of my colleague Mr. Bonner, the MLA for Edmonton-Glengarry. They are also accompanied today by a teacher's assistant, Elaine Kishimoto. They are in the public gallery, and I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the members of this House three very special visitors from Mount Royal school: Troy Runzer, chair of the Mount Royal School Council, and Jocelyn Pugh and Tuppy Tyler, members of the Mount Royal School Council. I will ask the visitors to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

head: **Ministerial Statements**  
**Treasury Branches**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Treasury Branches have come a long way in 60 years. Today with some 277 agencies and branches in some 239 communities in this province, 100 of which have only ATB servicing them in terms of financial services, they have an asset base of some \$8.2 billion, a loan portfolio of \$7.4 billion, some 900,000 deposit accounts. This last year alone ATB was involved in 7,800 mortgages; that's new mortgages. That represents a new investment in the province of some \$600 million. Twenty-four thousand small and medium-sized businesses last year alone received loans through this particular operation. A billion dollars in farm loans. This is a very significant operation. It has come a long way since 1938.

Some members may be able to recall and others will know from history that in 1938 ATB was formed with a \$200,000 infusion from the government. It was in response to a severe financial depression at the time and the eastern banks virtually vacating Alberta and leaving Albertans on their own without financial support. History does have a way of repeating itself, Mr.

Speaker, for in the '80s we saw similar things happen when there was a severe financial downturn related to our oil and gas revenues and once again eastern banks departing and leaving in many cases Alberta businesses to struggle. There are many people today who owe their ongoing future success in their businesses to ATB being there for them, focused on Alberta, and being willing to provide necessary services.

Over the last 10 years or so there have been some significant difficulties and challenges related to ATB, and those need to be addressed. They're not acceptable in many cases and need to be addressed. So, Mr. Speaker, in 1995-96, as you're aware and as members here would be aware, certain things were put into place to start a plan to see ATB result in and land in a financially secure situation. Part of that plan involved the establishment of a board, a board which will have its first ever in 60 years annual meeting and reporting this month, also the establishment of a CEO, a chairman, and a senior management with an organizational plan to address the difficulties related to ATB.

Part of that plan involves required legislative changes to allow ATB to do the things that they need to do. ATB has said for some number of years that they don't feel that they're in a competitive situation related to other financial institutions, they can't market certain financial products, they can't pay their own people on the basis of performance-based compensation, as other financial institutions do. On the other hand, financial institutions have said that they feel there's an unequal playing field because ATB have certain provisions related to a guarantee to their depositors and also they don't have to meet the same equity provisions as the banking institutions do. Those and other concerns are being addressed in legislative amendments which were tabled today.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, ATB will be required to pay a fee for that guarantee, as other financial institutions do - credit unions and banks - through the CDIC guarantee that they have. They will be required to begin to build equity provisions for their capital adequacy requirements. They will also be allowed to treat their employees as other financial institutions do, and related to compensation, there will be performance-based compensation packages so that they can keep and maintain their employees. They will be allowed to offer certain other financial products because of these amendments, though there will be restrictions significantly in the insurance industry, who we've consulted with and are pleased with what's being allowed and what is still being restricted. These are very substantial changes. Those are a few of the overriding ones that are anticipated in this legislation.

At this point I'd like to thank many, many people who have been involved in the development of these changes and amendments. Much consultation has gone on with the stakeholders. I'd like to thank my own colleagues for significant hours and hours of analysis and input on the amendments themselves. I'd like to thank the opposition for their demand for changes, which has coincided with our own concern to see changes happen, and for their interest in the legislation. I'll look forward to some ongoing constructive criticism there.

Mr. Speaker, this is the most significant legislative change in the last 60 years for ATB. This operation has the opportunity to be in a sound financial situation. I believe that this represents a very confident step into the future for ATB.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and respond to this important milestone in the evolution of the Alberta Treasury Branches through the introduction of Bill 33, the new Alberta Treasury Branches Act. The Alberta Liberal caucus wholeheartedly concurs with the sentiments expressed by the Provincial Treasurer about the importance of the Treasury Branch system and the role that it has played in the daily lives of Albertans within their communities; that is to say, our small business community, our agricultural sector, and our rural communities in particular. The Alberta Treasury Branches have been and we hope will continue to be an essential part of the very fabric of this great province.

I know that Albertans value the financial services that have been provided by the Alberta Treasury Branches over the past 60 years. Through their commitment to the principles of community banking, the Treasury Branches have been an important vehicle in smoothing over the volatile economic cycles that make Alberta somewhat unique within the greater framework of the North American economy. Albertans also recognize that in order for Treasury Branches to continue their record of very valuable service within our communities, they must have the tools to compete on a more level playing field with private-sector financial institutions, and to compete on that level playing field, they must operate within the context of a more effective framework of accountability and responsibility to us the shareholders, the people of Alberta.

Over the past four years Alberta Liberals have been in the forefront of offering constructive recommendations to the government to improve the accountability, autonomy, and profitability of the Alberta Treasury Branches. I just want to thank the Provincial Treasurer for his comments today, which in fact acknowledge some of those contributions that the Alberta Liberal opposition has made in a constructive way which in some part at least have led to this momentous event.

I would also like to commend the new management board at the Alberta Treasury Branches for adopting much more sound business practices and for improving the overall governance of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and I wish them well in their pursuit of even greater transparency and accountability to all Albertans. I believe that Bill 33 is an important step towards giving the Alberta Treasury Branches the tools needed to compete in a competitive, dynamic, and rapidly evolving financial services sector in our province. It's an exciting time for the Alberta Treasury Branches to move forward in their service to Albertans.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the Provincial Treasurer's efforts in bringing forward this legislation today for the consideration of all Albertans. Bill 33 will provide a base for the Alberta Treasury Branches to broaden their services, to establish the conditions for attaining an adequate capital base, to improve the prospects for future profitability, and to ensure that the Alberta Treasury Branches over time will move toward operating under the same rules as private sector financial institutions. I look forward to working more with all Albertans to further and strengthen the accountability, the autonomy, and the competitiveness of our Alberta Treasury Branches.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**  
**School Achievement**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, a recent study by the University of Calgary examined the relationship between school achievement

test results and family incomes. Students from 142 elementary schools were studied. The income levels of students' families were compared to the student achievement levels. The study shows something that's very startling but quite understandable: if you are poor, chances are that your children will do poorly in school. To the Minister of Education: now that we know what is going on in Calgary, are these findings consistent and applicable across the province?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would invite members of this Assembly to read the report which was tabled by the Leader of the Opposition. It also includes interesting information such as this, which I'll quote from the executive summary.

Variables that seemed to have no practical effects on achievements, as shown in this analysis, included the year the school was built and class sizes.

I've had the opportunity to look through this, and I think that it would be fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that there is a relationship or correlation, which is what the study indicates, between socioeconomic factors and achievement tests, but it does not go further, in my review of this report, to say that there's a cause and effect relationship between the two.

Mr. Speaker, as a result, because we recognize the correlation between socioeconomic factors and academic achievement, we do have programs such as the program enhancement project and the enhanced opportunity program that do provide additional resources for those schools that have primary factors such as family income, single-parent families, parent employment status, parents' facility with language of instruction, high incidence of crime, difficult access to services for children. Those are all factors; it's not just the issue of a family's income. So we do have funding for additional programs to enhance those opportunities for students in those circumstances.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, Mr. Speaker, if he has all this additional funding, then why is it that it clearly isn't working, as is outlined and argued very well by this Calgary study? What is he going to do to fix the problem?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, in looking quickly at the actual spending in these areas for the enhanced opportunity program, which is available for students in grades 1 through 12, we spent nearly \$3 million in the 1996-97 school year. The funding is based on the basis of school boards' applications to the department for proposed strategies in providing educational opportunities for economically disadvantaged students.

In the other program, Mr. Speaker, the program enhancement project, the actual spending was about 2 and a half million dollars. PEP funding, as it's referred to, can be used to offset fees for materials and for additional staff, extended program hours, and professional services such as psychologists or speech pathologists, staff development, and parent education. For those people that had experience in dealing with the PEP program and the EOP program, I think they would say quite emphatically that that spending is being targeted to a very important area and that the projects that are funded through those two areas of funding are often very, very successful indeed.

MR. MITCHELL: The achievement results indicate that those programs are not sufficient, aren't sufficiently funded. Do you know why? Because they're not working.

What plan does the Minister of Education have to ensure that lower income children are getting the kind of support that they

need in our educational system and that they won't become throwaway kids at some time in the future?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are many things that this government is doing. I would have to disagree with the observations of the hon. Leader of the Opposition with respect to the quality of programs that are being provided through EOP and through PEP. Further, some of the issues and the concerns and the needs of these students are far greater than those which are merely educational.

**2:00**

Mr. Speaker, I strongly am of the view that the integration of services to children is an important step towards dealing with all needs of children, not just the educational ones. The hon. minister responsible for children's services may wish to supplement this, but in my view the needs of these students are often more than just educational. They may relate to the Justice department or social services or the Minister of Health's department, and in all cases we do have to look at factors other than just the socioeconomic standings of these students. We do have to ensure that these students are having every opportunity that they can have to become happy and productive members of society, and we must ensure that the entire child is dealt with, not just the educational issues.

To simply suggest, Mr. Speaker, that because a family is of a lower economic scale – that is no excuse for having a student that doesn't do well. There are many students in this province that come from lower socioeconomic standings and still do well at school. We encourage that, we promote that, and we want to help those kids.

### **Calgary Education System**

MR. MITCHELL: From speaking yesterday, Mr. Speaker, with many people concerned about the public school system in Calgary, it became very clear to me that there are serious problems in the Calgary public education system: large class sizes, inadequate special-needs support, endless fund-raising by parents, tense labour negotiations, and significant morale problems with teachers and administrators. To the Minister of Education: when the minister visits a school in this province, why does he send prior instructions that he is not to be confronted by teachers? What is it that they want to tell him that he doesn't want to hear?

MR. MAR: That is absolutely absurd; it is patently untrue. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that in traveling to hundreds of schools in this province, the people are not shrinking violets in letting you know what their concerns are. There are some legitimate concerns out there, and that is the purpose of my attendance upon these schools: to find out, you know, what the concerns are and how we might be able to deal with them.

Again the hon. Leader of the Opposition is choosing to perhaps be selective in his look at this sort of fact, this study that he tabled earlier today, where it clearly says that variables that have no practical effect on achievements include class sizes. Mr. Speaker, he cannot stand here in this House and say that part of this study is good and part of it is not.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that in going to schools – we do have good schools in this province that are occasionally excellent, and we want to make sure that we have excellent schools that are occasionally only very good. There are concerns that people express, but in no way have I ever suggested for a moment that

I don't want to hear about legitimate concerns that teachers or parents or students or school trustees or administrators have about schools in the province of Alberta.

MR. MITCHELL: Of course, the Calgary caucus met with ATA members, and the minister, who's from Calgary, walked in for several minutes, walked out, walked back in for several minutes, walked out, and said that he couldn't comment; he hadn't been there long enough.

Mr. Speaker, Calgaryans are still waiting for government MLAs to be named to the joint working group proposed by the minister two months ago to look into Calgary's educational problems. Where are the members of this Legislative Assembly who he's appointed, or has he? When are they going to be appointed, or was this simply another public relations exercise to patch up the problems and keep them away from the public?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we've enjoyed good relationships with members of the Calgary board of education. We've met with them. I've met with them myself on a number of occasions. The chairman and I have met. Members of caucus have met with the members of the Calgary board of education. We are working co-operatively in an effort to attempt to discern some of the issues that may surround the Calgary board of education to determine fact from fiction. We'll continue to work together with the board on those issues.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, glib answers don't deny the fact that there are serious problems in Calgary's education system. With the government's own backbench MLAs raising serious matters and serious questions of this Minister of Education, when is he going to stand up and take charge of this and make it right?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that in this province I attend upon school boards, and I'm very pleased with the responsibility that is assumed by trustees. It is a difficult job. I know that the hon. Member for St. Albert had a good laugh the other day when we were talking about schools and there was some suggestion that school trustees were in the business for their own financial remuneration and padding their wallets. That's not in fact the case. Trustees make a tremendous sacrifice to be a part of an important aspect of the Alberta advantage, and that's our education for students in the province.

It does not serve students of this province well for the members from the opposition and particularly the Leader of the Opposition to be attacking members of the Calgary board of education. We achieve a great deal more through co-operation rather than confrontation. That is our goal.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

### **Treasury Branches**

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past four years the Alberta Liberal opposition has brought forward many constructive suggestions and recommendations for improving the accountability, autonomy, and competitiveness of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and many of those suggestions and recommendations are today incorporated in the new Alberta Treasury Branches Act. But as shareholders in the Treasury Branches, Albertans need to be assured of the most effective framework for accountability and independence from any possibil-

ity of political pressure. Tools to improve profitability must be in place so that Alberta Treasury Branches can continue to provide a high quality level of service to their customers and to preserve the concept of community banking and to raise the much needed \$600 million in capital for ATB to compete on a level playing field with the private sector. My questions are to the Provincial Treasurer in that regard. Now that the Alberta Treasury Branches have been given the status of a Crown corporation under Bill 33, will the Treasurer make a commitment to further improve accountability by having the chief executive officer of Alberta Treasury Branches appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to account for the operations of Treasury Branches, which is similar to what happens currently with Crown lending institutions such as the Alberta Opportunity Company and the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, prefacing his comments was his notice that indeed there's some independence being achieved here with these amendments and rightly so. Alberta Treasury Branches need that arm's-length relationship to be able to be held accountable and to be able to deal in the manner in which they have to deal.

As the member will see – and we don't want to anticipate legislation that's been tabled – there's a number of provisions that will hold the Treasury Branches accountable. There is a number of provisions there that require prudent lending practices and prudent investment practices. If the CEO were to come before Public Accounts, that is getting in a very close government relationship again, and Crown corporations of this type as built with this framework today do not require their CEOs actually to come before Public Accounts, separate from the two that were mentioned. This is a different type of entity. I don't anticipate at this time that that CEO would be required to report here, though the plans and the numbers every year are required to be subjected to the Auditor General for review.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: With regard to the issue of payment of deposit insurance and the issue of capital adequacy requirements for the Alberta Treasury Branches, will the Treasurer agree to bringing those issues before this Assembly for some debate prior to them being passed by any regulations?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the credit union with similar provisions is not required to do that. Theirs are set by regulation, and I would anticipate the same would follow through to ATB.

I think the overriding concern that I'm hearing here from the member is that there should be some kind of accountability and some awareness of the discussion that goes on and what's involved in the setting of those particular fees. I can give a commitment that that will be an open discussion, that we would keep all Albertans apprised of the discussion. I can't guarantee nor would I say that it would necessarily be done here in the Legislature. There are some timing elements there. If for instance in a given year there wasn't a fall session, if there were no necessity for that but a change was required, it's much more applicable that this be done through regulations as the other financial institutions do theirs.

**2:10**

MR. ZWOZDESKY: My final question is: now that the Treasury Branches will be allowed to establish subsidiaries in such service areas as asset management and disposal of assets, will the Treasurer assure shareholders, Albertans, that the establishment

of the asset management subsidiaries by the Alberta Treasury Branches will be subject to an order in council so that there's no possible cloak of secrecy that might develop?

MR. DAY: That's a good suggestion, Mr. Speaker. We've actually anticipated doing that. I can give a commitment to the member, following his request today, that not only will it be done by order in council, but there would be an open consultation process with stakeholders and also with opposition members and other concerned Albertans. So it will be open, and I'll commit today that it will be done by order in council.

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

### Education Funding

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From 1993 to 1996 this government made huge cuts to education funding. Since then, the small increases in funding do not make up for the earlier cuts. This government has been pushing schools to develop partnerships with corporations and engage in fund-raising activities to make up for the funding shortfall. Parents such as those visiting today from Mount Royal school are becoming increasingly concerned about relying on activities such as bingo and casinos to pay for their children's schooling. My question is to the seemingly hardworking but sometimes wrongheaded Minister of Education. How can the minister justify underfunding education to such an extent that schools and parent councils are forced to use questionable and often objectionable fund-raising activities for such essentials as computers and library resources?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I've often commented in this Legislature about the amount of funding that we provide for students in the province of Alberta for instruction and also on top of that for capital and administration and transportation and other such matters. In my strong opinion, education is appropriately funded in this province. We provide \$3,686 dollars per student just for instruction. Over and above that, we do provide funding for transportation, for operations and maintenance of facilities, for administration.

If people are expecting the overall budget of the Department of Education to go up by some hypothetical amount or percentage, then I wish to dampen their expectations, but if people are expecting that we should reinvest money in certain areas where we know that we can get a great deal of return on our investment, then people can expect that they will get a fair hearing from this government.

With respect to fund-raising, fund-raising frankly has always been a part of the expectations of schools, and that is because parents have always wanted what is best for their sons and daughters. Mr. Speaker, whether a school decides to raise money for a computer or whether it's to raise money for a video camera recorder or other equipment, if parents feel that that's an important resource that their sons or daughters should have, then they should be prepared to spend some amount of time ensuring that that resource is provided to them through fund-raising.

DR. PANNU: The picture that the minister is painting is obviously belied by the growing concerns of parents all around this province, Mr. Speaker.

Given that increased reliance on fund-raising disproportionately benefits schools in higher income areas, how will the minister

ensure that schools located in poorer areas do not lose out and that children attending these schools have equal access to a quality education?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's a fairly reasonable question, and I can say that in my observation there are some schools that come from districts in this province that we would not expect to have high socioeconomic patterns. But from time to time there are schools that continue to surprise me that come from these perhaps lower income areas that frankly do very well in terms of their fund-raising efforts and their community efforts. We do promote parental involvement in these schools. We do promote community partnerships, business partnerships. Also, school boards themselves recognize the sometimes disparity in the resources that may be available to schools within their jurisdiction, and they do have the opportunity to redirect funds on a local basis so that the needs of students that come from districts that may be less advantaged are in fact met.

So, Mr. Speaker, we do provide things like what I referred to earlier, the PEP program and the EOP program. We do recognize that there are students that are disadvantaged economically and otherwise, and we do make every effort to make sure that every student in this province does as well as possible in our schools.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, the statements of the minister are made in earnest obviously, but they don't seem to account for the growing inequalities in our schools.

Given that phone companies like AT&T and Telus are making deals with school districts whereby children and parents are out flogging long distance services, how will the minister evaluate corporate partnerships to ensure that benefits to schools outweigh benefits to the corporations involved and that our schoolchildren don't simply become marketing agents for large corporations?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is a concern that I think I've heard expressed by others, and I think it's a legitimate point to raise. I do have to say that corporations like Telus take their corporate responsibilities very seriously in the province of Alberta. That is the reason why they've been involved in corporate partnerships with the Department of Education, with school boards, and with other groups in the education area to help ensure that something is put back into the community.

Mr. Speaker, it's not incumbent upon the Minister of Education to necessarily judge the merits of these particular fund-raising schemes. I think it's appropriate that at a school level or at a jurisdiction level a school board or a school can decide whether or not this is an appropriate way to raise funds. If they feel that it is, then they should have the entitlement, the ability, the right to choose to do such a thing. Whether it's peddling chocolate bars or whether it's phone cards, I think the principle is the same. The schools and the parents and the school boards must make the decision as to whether that's an appropriate way to be raising funds.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

### **Catholic Education System**

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I almost feel I should let the hon. Minister of Education rest for a minute, so I'm going to direct my questions to the minister of intergovernmental

affairs. Across Canada people of the Catholic faith watch and worry when they see their educational rights eroded. In Quebec the school boards will be established on the basis of language rather than religion, and many feel this puts us on the brink of losing Catholic education. The Prime Minister has been asked to amend the Constitution so that Quebec can replace most of its boards with French or English boards. A similar amendment that was prepared through a referendum process in Newfoundland has already established Newfoundland denominational schools as being removed, and the provincial government has intervened in that. My first question is to the minister of intergovernmental affairs. Can the federal government dismantle Alberta's Catholic education system with similar amendments to our Constitution?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, under the Constitution of Canada it's impossible for the federal government to unilaterally change the rights of Alberta's denomination-based schools. Education is a provincial responsibility. That means constitutional changes in that area require the permission of Alberta to make the change. Any change in that area would have to be at our request, as it was with both Newfoundland and Quebec. Also, any constitutional amendment in Alberta must first be approved by the people of Alberta under our Constitutional Referendum Act before any change can be approved by this House. So Albertans can be sure that the Catholic education system in this province is secure.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: given that the Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association tabled this as a major item for discussion at their convention this weekend, how will Alberta be affected by these constitutional changes made to accommodate other provinces?

MR. HANCOCK: Again, Mr. Speaker, as education is a provincial responsibility, the changes to the Constitution in any area of that nature which would affect any individual province can only be made with the permission and at the request of that province, so Alberta is not in any way affected by the changes in Newfoundland or Quebec.

2:20

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Education. Will he give the Catholic people of Alberta some peace of mind and explain how he plans to protect the rights of Catholics in Alberta as we go through these changes in other provinces?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the rights of minority religions, whether Protestant or Catholic, to form separate school districts were a part of the 1901 territorial ordinances. They were enshrined in legislation, the constituting statutes of the province of Alberta, in 1905, when Alberta joined Confederation, and they are enshrined in the School Act. The right of Catholic Albertans to a Catholic education is a constitutional guarantee. This province is dedicated to upholding that right.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has one publicly funded system of education. It includes the public and the separate schools, which provide education programs to students in such a way that the rights of the Constitution of Canada are maintained. I have made this assurance before. I have written letters to officials of the Catholic school system. I have made that commitment to parents and teachers, and I will continue to protect Catholic education in the province of Alberta.

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

### Regional Health Authorities

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government stubbornly refuses to give us a firm date when regional health authorities will be subject to freedom of information. Meanwhile these 17 unelected boards spend close to \$2.2 billion of taxpayers' money. The problem with this lack of accountability came home last week with a report on the Crossroads regional health authority, a report done by a close friend of the government who said that "lack of transparency" is the root cause of many of the problems which have plagued this regional health authority. My question, of course, is to the Minister of Health this afternoon. What concrete action is this minister going to take to ensure that all regional health authority boards do virtually all of their business in public? In other words, will he amend the appropriate Alberta regulation to limit the opportunity for secret meetings?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, as has been indicated in this Assembly, we certainly intend that regional health authority boards will come under the purview of freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation. It is a matter of preparing, and there is extensive reorganization and preparation involved in this initiative, and it has to be allowed for. Certainly there is that commitment, and I want to emphasize that.

Secondly, with respect to the review and the question raised by the hon. member, we of course have certain specific circumstances in the Crossroads regional health authority which they have to address. These are not typical of the regional health authorities in this province but of a more general nature. We have indicated previously that we have commissioned a study with respect to the overall governance structure of regional health authorities, and that initiative will be made public within the next couple of weeks. We will follow through because in that report there are certain legislative implications. We'll be following through with necessary legislative changes after the report has been assessed.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, since on April 24, 1997, the same minister told us that there would be an investigation by "a neutral outside party," on what basis could that description apply to a corporation run by a man who ran as a Conservative candidate in the 1993 election and the woman who's president of the Edmonton-Gold Bar Conservative constituency association?

MR. JONSON: Well, you know, first of all, I would challenge the hon. member, since he is quoting from and using the material in the report to raise questions – and that's a legitimate function in this Assembly certainly – to indicate what is nonneutral about this particular report. I think it's a good report. Every indication is that it has recommendations which pertain to the issues as far as the Crossroads regional health authority is concerned, and the Crossroads regional health authority will be following up on those recommendations with the assistance of government. And, yes, Mr. Speaker, on the government side of the House we do know some very good, able, capable people.

MR. DICKSON: An interesting redefinition of neutrality, Mr. Speaker.

My final question would be this: will the minister at least commit to a program and performance audit and a comprehensive

systems review, both done by the Auditor General, about whom there's no question in terms of objectivity and independence?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the regional health authorities are subject to scrutiny by the Auditor General. The majority of the regional health authorities in fact have their audits done through the office of the Auditor General, and in other cases their financial statements are vetted and approved and recommended on, yes, in some cases, by the Auditor General. So certainly we're committed to proper examination of regional health authorities' financial records.

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

### Sexual Assault on Children

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One in four women in Alberta are sexually assaulted at some time in their life, and of these, one-half will be assaulted before the age of 17. A Manitoba sexual assault case involving a 12- or 13-year-old girl has outraged members of my community. The judge's comments on the circumstances of this case were extremely offensive. His reference to discount sentences handed out by the courts are of particular concern. My question today is to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister explain what these discount sentences are, and can he advise this House if such practices are carried out in Alberta?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's being referred to here is sentences which are a result of the passage of Bill C-41, which was implemented in September of 1996. What the Bill does is permit judges some discretion in sentencing. When it's established that the offender does not pose a threat to the community, the judge can order community service, in other words, a conditional sentence, and that sentence is to be served in the community as opposed to in custody. Now, if an offender reoffends during the period in which the conditional sentence is in place, then the offender is required to serve the remainder of the sentence in custody.

Alberta supported the introduction of Bill C-41, Mr. Speaker. We see it being a great benefit because it allows us to divert people who are guilty of less serious offences into other means of rehabilitation as opposed to custody. Conditional sentences also ensure that our offenders do provide some community service. They learn some new skills, and that again is beneficial. Now, it's not in any way intended to be a discount sentence, but rather, again, it's simply what we see to be a very good alternative to serving custody, and it is working quite well in Alberta at this time.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am interested in the minister's department. Mr. Minister, how is your department handling cases involving child sexual assault?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we view child sexual assault very seriously in the department, and our prosecutors are instructed to prosecute to the full extent of the law. We view this not only as a serious crime but rather a serious breach of a trust relationship, because quite often this occurs in a situation where a child is entrusted to the care of an individual. I've made mention of our serious and violent crime strategy, and a major component of that strategy is to classify offences. Sexual assault



is classified as a category 1 offence, and those offences are vigorously prosecuted by our Crown prosecutors. We do seek significant time in custody for those offenders. I can assure the hon. member that only in the most exceptional circumstances would we even consider agreeing to a conditional sentence relating to a sexual assault offence.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is again to the Minister of Justice. Are there educational awareness programs currently in place for Alberta's judges that include appropriate sentencing of child sex offenders?

2:30

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, our department does not become directly involved in that area. Rather, judges are responsible for identifying the areas in which they feel they need to have greater awareness, some general education, and receive additional information. Now, they are very proactive in accessing additional information. They do have educational seminars on a regular basis. They do meet regularly to discuss emerging concerns and issues, and guest speakers are quite often invited to speak to the judges. But our department does not become directly involved in that aspect.

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

### Lobbyists

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the Ethics Commissioner's recommendation in his annual report to start a lobbyist registry, the government has still done nothing. The government has not learned their lesson. Even after scandals like Multi-Corp there is only talk about accountability but no action. To the Minister of Justice: why is it the government's policy to keep its dealings with lobbyists a secret? What do they have to hide?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we aren't keeping anything secret quite frankly. When lobbyists come and meet with the government, quite often those meetings are open to the public. We have standing policy committees, and groups come forward and make presentations to us. I have no problem. If anyone wishes to meet with me on a matter, I quite often will actually ask that the person who's being represented attend the meeting as opposed to the lobbyist because, quite frankly, I prefer to hear it from the individual impacted as opposed to the lobbyist.

MRS. PAUL: My second question to the Minister of Justice as well: why is the government, then, ignoring their own ethics watchdog and refusing to set up the lobbyist registry?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, caucus certainly discussed that issue, and in light of the fact that there didn't seem to be much of a problem, that we are very open with respect to our dealings with the general public in most things that we do, we really didn't see the need. We had discussed it with some of the individuals in Ottawa, and it hasn't really done much from what I would suggest is a proactive perspective. I believe that Albertans have the confidence in their elected officials to do what is right. We just didn't see the need to put this in place at this time. It just didn't really add anything other than another layer of bureaucracy, which I know is something that the opposition supports.

MRS. PAUL: My last question, then, to the Minister of Justice: in this report it is recommended that the lobbyist registry be set up, and we want to know when you will be doing it.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I guess that based on my two previous answers, the chances of us setting up a lobbyist registry at this time are probably zero.

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

### Oil Prices

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Energy prices and energy revenues are very important to the success of our province on a fiscal basis, but the price of oil is trading down at \$18.77 U.S. a barrel today. That's down \$3 from its recent peak and in fact down \$2.30 in the last week. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Could you please explain why prices are falling so rapidly, and are they likely to continue?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are always some seasonal adjustments following heavy utilization during the cold winter months, and we expect that as next winter comes on, we'll see some strengthening again. There are some other factors that play a key role. One has to do with what we call geopolitics. As we go throughout the world, we look at the OPEC nations, and they, under self-regulation under their production rates – there's some indication that they're varying a little bit at the present time. We expect that that will be looked into.

Also we had a humanitarian production in the world in Iraq itself under the humanitarian aid program to Iraq, in which they are producing about 600,000 barrels a day. They're allowed to produce upwards of \$2 billion U.S. every six months. Now, that ended on June 6, and they're negotiating backwards. The United States would like them to come off that production, but they're still producing that.

Another is that it's true that the U.S. crude and product stock levels have increased in the last several weeks, and we have the U.S. refinery utilization, which was running at about 97 percent. That's going to back off shortly, most of the industry feels, and we'll see some declines on their demands.

We've had some new field start-ups in the North Sea. There's been inclement weather there, but we're watching that closely because that's over and it's expected by the industry and world markets that there'll be new production coming onstream very shortly.

Of course, the other thing you have to watch very closely is the differential spread between light crude and heavy crude. In May this year it was running around a \$7 differential between those two. A year ago it was \$3.44. That sends a tough signal to the heavy oil production, because they function better on a low margin basis. Right now, with the paving season coming into line, of course we'll see a greater demand on the heavy line, and it will affect the price of the regular crude.

I could go on a long time because there are a lot more indicators.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair was waiting for you to get to the Indo-China sea.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to

the Provincial Treasurer. You know, without hoping for an early winter, what effect is this decline now having on the government's 1997-98 fiscal plan?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, on February 11 the government tabled a budget which we presented to the people of Alberta and asked for their endorsement through the electoral process. We are very grateful for the fact that an increasing number of Albertans endorsed that budget and endorsed our plan in the election. By the time we did the budget update – and we didn't want to change significantly because it was that particular budget that was voted on – there had been some softening in terms of some long-term projections, as the Minister of Energy has just indicated. Following consultation with the Minister of Energy and caucus colleagues and using other forecasting instruments, we made a decision to actually lower the price to \$18.50 rather than \$19 in terms of projecting what it would be for the year. As soon as we did that, the price shot up the next day. If that's any indication, maybe we should lower it again and go for an even higher price.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that as recently as a week ago there was reflection in the media that there might be up to a \$500 million windfall because prices were going to stay high. Since some of the articles, even last week, prices have dropped down now to below \$19. It's at \$18.77 today. It was lower than that yesterday. It shows that we may be, unfortunately, close in terms of our projection. If the average price over the year stays at \$18.50, our fiscal plan will not be altered. We should still see that surplus of \$750 million if it stays at that particular price.

MS HALEY: My final supplemental to the Provincial Treasurer then is: at what price does our balanced budget become unsustainable?

MR. DAY: That's a key question and actually one that I'm almost afraid to look at, but we have looked at it very carefully and very clearly. Just for rough estimating purposes, if people want to keep this in mind, over the year for every dollar the oil price drops on average and maintains that average, we lose 170-plus million dollars in revenue. So if you want to make a really rough estimation, figure \$1 at \$200 million. That's if gas prices stay the same and corporate revenue stays the same. So it's significant.

Using that particular estimation, we could – and again we hope this doesn't happen – absorb an oil price shock, a hit on our revenues as low as about \$15.50 on average over the year without having to start to once again reduce government services, which we would have to do because it's against the law in Alberta to have a deficit now. So \$15.50 is the absolute minimum at which we'd like to see it.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, that there's another compensating factor, and that is that about 12 years ago 40 percent of our revenues were based on the price of oil, revenues directly from oil. That's now less than 20 percent. Ten years ago most of the corporate revenue received was oil and gas based. There's been quite a shift, and for the first time in 1995 we saw more corporate revenue come in from manufacturing than we did from oil and gas revenues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

## 2:40 Video Lottery Terminals

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, recently a provincewide organization indicated that they're prepared to spend up to \$2 million in

a fight to retain VLTs. Well, this caucus is prepared to fight, too, to get rid of VLTs, not with \$2 million but with the support of a lot of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the most frightening part of the statement was the prediction made by the head of the Alberta Hotel Association that up to 400 municipalities could be dealing with anti-VLT plebiscites next year; that's up to 400 municipalities. Rather than put up to 400 municipalities through the turmoil over VLTs, will the minister responsible for lotteries simply do the right thing and order a provincewide plebiscite to deal with the VLT question once and for all?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I think I've answered this question 12 times in this session. I'll go through it one more time for the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. There is a process in place so that each community can determine whether they want to go through a petition and then a plebiscite and have their council contact us. That position has not changed, nor is it going to change. We will follow through on that, as I've indicated before many times in this Legislature.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, there is a process in place that costs the municipalities money. Will the minister, to avoid the expense to municipalities, establish a pool of 1 percent of net lottery revenues to help municipalities offset the costs of these plebiscites? One percent.

MRS. BLACK: No.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, will the minister do the honourable thing for all Albertans and simply rid the province of the VLTs?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, since I became responsible for lotteries, gaming, liquor, and racing, I've talked to an awful lot of people throughout this province. I was amazed to find that there are today 10,400 registered charities with gaming and lotteries in the province of Alberta. That means there are an awful lot of people that are involved in fund-raising for their communities through gaming and lotteries.

MR. MITCHELL: But not through VLTs.

MRS. BLACK: In all aspects. The little chirpy over here could maybe listen and find out something about this, if he would, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what I have found is that there's an awful lot of funds that do go back to the communities through the lottery funds, and they come in through all avenues. Whether it's through 6/49, through bingos, through pull tickets, through VLTs, through slots, all of this comes in and flows either through general revenue or through the lottery estimates directly back to communities.

It's pretty important for communities to make decisions, Mr. Speaker, as to what they choose to have within their communities. That's why this process is important: to let the communities, instead of a group in this Legislature, determine what's right for that community. So I would say that the process that has been adopted is in fact workable, and it should be determined at the community level. That process is in keeping with the Municipal Government Act, whereby a community has the ability through a petition to collect signatures and support for a position, no matter

what that is, and carry it forward with a certain number of names to their council and ask them to hold a plebiscite. That has, in fact, already occurred in the province. Then they can come to me, and I can make a decision as to remove them or not.

#### Effect of Trade Agreements on Exports

MR. HIERATH: Mr. Speaker, the University of Alberta has just completed a study praising the Canada free trade agreement and the North America free trade agreement for boosting the western provinces' exports. Yet even when the facts are presented, there are lots of critics who would argue the benefits of a more protectionist trade environment. My question is to the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs. What were the specific findings of the study on free trade?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, the study that the hon. member is referring to is entitled *The Alberta and Western Canadian Export Experience: 1988-96*. It was prepared by the University of Alberta's Western Centre for Economic Research. In short, the study found that greater access to the U.S. market for all western provinces and particularly for Alberta has been important to our export growth. In addition, the report indicated that the trade agreements have served Alberta's public policy well by playing an essential role in achieving that growth.

Simply put, the trade policy has opened markets. The study shows that in 1996 our global exports increased 16 percent from 1995 and now account for more than 40 percent of the total western Canadian exports. In the past eight years, since the free trade agreement was implemented, the value of Alberta's foreign exports has grown by 140 percent. It's evident from the study that agreements like the FTA and NAFTA, which help to bring down trade barriers, can improve our competitiveness abroad and lead to diversification into global markets.

MR. HIERATH: Mr. Speaker, could the same minister expand on how Alberta's value-added sector has performed under the free trade agreements?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, the report particularly shows exceptional growth in the value-added sector. For example, between 1988 and 1996 exports of paper and paperboard products increased more than 2,000 percent. Beef exports rose more than 900 percent. There's been exceptional growth in the telephone equipment sector. Exports have increased almost 1,400 percent. Alberta companies, including some right here in Edmonton, are making the most of our trade agreements by focusing on foreign markets for their expansion, and they're succeeding.

MR. HIERATH: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what is Alberta doing to promote similar trade arrangements, since they appear to be such a benefit to Alberta businesses?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question because we're now in the middle of a number of international negotiations that the federal government is involved in. Alberta continues to push for provincial participation with the federal government in developing those agreements because it's important that we have our say when those decisions are being made.

Last year a bilateral free trade agreement between Canada and Chile was concluded, and I understand that that agreement will come into full effect on July 1 of this year. Alberta worked to ensure favourable provisions which would benefit our business

sectors regarding investment, energy, and agriculture. Alberta will continue to support initiatives to promote freer trade with South America. Next year Canada is expected to begin negotiations on a free trade agreement within the Americas.

There are a number of other initiatives, Mr. Speaker. It's a good area for Alberta, and it's proved to be exceptionally valuable to our export business.

#### head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there are three members who've indicated their interest in providing a member's statement today. We'll proceed first of all with the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

#### Alberta-Montana Heritage Tourism

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I had the privilege of visiting the very impressive Western Heritage Centre in Cochrane with many of my colleagues here. We were attending the launching of a very exciting campaign celebrating a partnership between Alberta and Montana to promote heritage tourism. We heard the history of how the co-operative marketing venture was conceived in 1995 at the Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism. We met representatives of the nine government and nongovernment partners who form this Alberta-Montana Heritage Partnership, which includes Alberta Community Development, Alberta Environmental Protection, Alberta Museums Association, Canadian Heritage, Glenbow Museum, the Western Heritage Centre, Travel Alberta, Montana Historical Society, and Travel Montana. Joining the celebration were the campaign's corporate sponsors: ITV, Telus Corporation, and West Edmonton Mall. A total of \$650,000 has been contributed to the three-year campaign, which is considered to be the largest tourism marketing initiative ever undertaken between a Canadian province and an American state.

The central component of this comprehensive marketing campaign is a 350-page guide book, *The Alberta-Montana Discovery Guide: Museums, Parks & Historic Sites*. This book provides information for approximately 500 heritage sites, including descriptions, directions, and maps. The partners have also developed print and television advertisements including public service announcements featuring the talented Alberta recording artist, Cindy Church, who provided entertainment at the launch. The goal of the campaign is to increase Albertans' awareness of heritage tourism by 10 percent and increase visitation to heritage sites by 5 percent per year. Alberta and Montana are building a close relationship that will benefit us both.

I would like to acknowledge and congratulate all those individuals and groups who worked hard at realizing a good idea that clearly will have a positive impact on our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### 2:50 Labour Relations

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two big Safeway stores are located in my riding of Edmonton-Strathcona. It's therefore personally gratifying to see the 70-day-long dispute come to an end.

While the strike has been settled, the fundamental unfairness of Alberta's labour laws remains. Many underlying broader issues

of this dispute need serious examination. This dispute raises questions concerning minimum wage, part-time work, prorated benefits, growing poverty, replacement workers, imbalance of power between employers and employees, and the list goes on.

This dispute reflects the growing tensions in our society. The vision of many employers in this province of an ideal workplace is typified by the Alberta government's human resources strategy. This strategy in effect accepts high levels of unemployment or underemployment; promotes low-wage, low-benefit part-time work; and treats employees as a disposable commodity. Such a strategy, Mr. Speaker, is shortsighted and doomed to fail. The Safeway workers were asking for a fair wage, minimum guaranteed hours, and improved benefits. Safeway pleaded poverty and refused to compensate for earlier employee concessions.

Mr. Speaker, this government's unfair labour laws contributed to prolonging rather than resolving the Safeway dispute. If any one group deserves credit for helping to resolve this dispute, it is the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who voted with their pocketbooks by staying away from the Safeway stores from the beginning to the end of the strike. By staying away from Safeway stores, these Albertans showed that they stood for fairness.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if the government really intends to promote good labour relations, it must learn some lessons from the strike. It must bring in legislation to prohibit the use of replacement workers. It must provide for prorated benefits. It must raise the minimum wage and continually review it.

Thank you.

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

#### Men's Health Week

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to announce an important event which addresses the vital issue of men's health. The promotion of men's health unfortunately is not a very widespread issue, and as such, I'm honoured to not only endorse Men's Health Week but share some information with this House.

Mr. Speaker, the week of June 9 to June 15, 1997, will mark the first celebration of Men's Health Week, as proclaimed by the city of Calgary. The health week will focus on a broad range of physical and mental health issues impacting men. The health week provides men, their families, and friends with information to assist them in understanding the uniqueness of male issues, general health problems, and to confront health-related topics with proactive and preventive health measures.

The health week promotes regular visits to the doctor and encourages women and family members to encourage the men in their lives to be more health conscious. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, the promotion of early screening and detection is advocated, which ultimately can save men's lives.

Men's Health Week is a collaborative effort initiated by the Family of Men Support Society, which seeks to create the Men's Health Week foundation, which will expand the health week nationwide. The foundation will include several other health-related organizations.

This co-ordinated effort empowers men with the required knowledge of health issues and preventive measures to live long and healthy lives and is consistent with this government's health action plan, which advocates preventing illness and promoting good health.

Working together, we can provide a healthy and vibrant Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader on a purported point of order.

#### Point of Order Imputing Motives Preambles to Supplementary Questions

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to getting to the main part of my argument, regarding preambles, I would like to draw your attention to 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives."

In his second question the Leader of the Opposition was imputing the Minister of Education because he apparently absented himself on occasion from a meeting with the ATA and was not at all concerned with their message. Personally, I have no idea why he was absenting himself from those meetings. I can assure you that the Leader of the Opposition would have absolutely no idea either. However, that in the past has not precluded him from commenting on an issue. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition was not there. He was not aware of the circumstances for the withdrawal from the meeting, and therefore I felt his comments were inappropriate in accordance with 23(i).

The main argument, though, Mr. Speaker, as I think we've seen over the last few days on occasion, is questions and in particular the supplementary part of questions having a significant preamble, and that certainly is in contradiction of the memorandum of agreement which was signed by all parties of this Legislature. I would ask that you remind members of that and on occasion also enforce it as you see fit. I think it would be quite helpful.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, three points, briefly, in response. The first one is that the Opposition House Leader asserted what I would submit is a question of fact, that the Minister of Education had attended a meeting, left, reattended briefly. That doesn't do anything other than to allege an issue of fact. It certainly doesn't bring it within Standing Order 23(i). I don't have *Hansard* or the Blues in front of me, but my recollection was that it was a very specific assertion of fact.

The other point would be that article 408(2) in *Beauchesne* says that answers to questions "should not," among other things, "provoke debate," and I'd respectfully submit on behalf of the Opposition House Leader that the comments made by the Minister of Education, regardless of his motivation, were indeed provocative.

The last thing I'd suggest is that notwithstanding the terms of the agreement entered into by the House leaders and the Standing Orders, it's very clear that there is a kind of flexibility and elasticity with respect to the initial two questions asked by the Leader of the Opposition in, I think, acknowledgment and recognition of the importance of those first two questions. It seemed to me that in the give-and-take that typically characterized the first two questions of the Leader of the Opposition, we were well within what would perhaps be described as a conventional practice in this House.

I would respectfully submit that there's been no breach of Standing Orders, the provision of *Beauchesne*, or indeed the practices of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the briefer the questions, the briefer the responses, the more questions, and the more responses. Today we arrived at some 11 main questions in this Assembly,

which is just about average, but it seemed to be that they were hard pressed to get to the 11.

The purported point of order that the hon. Government House Leader is rising on today, essentially two of them – I'm going to read for the record the second question, the first supplemental question, by the Leader of the Official Opposition. This is what it is, and you judge for yourself if it's brief and if it has or does not have a preamble, because I will give a judgment.

Of course, the Calgary caucus met with ATA members, and the minister, who's from Calgary, walked in for several minutes, walked out, walked back in for several minutes, walked out, and said he couldn't comment. He hadn't been there long enough.

Mr. Speaker, Calgarians are still waiting for government MLAs to be named to the joint working group proposed by the minister two months ago to look into Calgary's educational problems. Where are the members of this Legislative Assembly who he's appointed, or has he? When are they going to be appointed? Was this simply another public relations exercise to patch up the problems and keep them away from the public?

Well, it's pretty clear to the Speaker that if we recognize the conventions that we've arrived at in terms of the agreement between the various parties in this particular Assembly, the practice in question period was to be one main question and two supplementary questions without preamble. That was a signed agreement between the House leaders of all three parties that that was to be the way it should happen. Hon. members might want to go further beyond that and just check out *Beauchesne* 409(2) and 410(8), which states that "a supplementary question should [have] no preamble."

3:00

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, on your point about *Beauchesne* 408(2), "Answers . . . should not provoke debate," if you wanted to rise on a point of order, I would invite you to rise on a point of order, but your defence on the point of order by the Government House Leader should not be another point of order or inherent within it. I think it probably would be inappropriate to say, "Well, my defence is that I'm blaming that person for provoking me to do it." It's an interesting strategy, but not one that will probably be accepted today by the Chair.

So congratulations, Government House Leader. You finally won on a point of order, without any doubt.

I would ask the Opposition House Leader to convey the thoughts of the Chair and the thoughts that were exercised in the last few minutes with respect to this real point of order.

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

**Bill 208**  
**Kananaskis Park Act**

[Adjourned debate June 4: Mr. Coutts]

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we adjourned debate on this, I was bringing the House up to date on certain events and policies and management principles that were put in place around and bordering Kananaskis Country which Bill 208 refers to. Basically, I was pointing out that the area is already well protected under the Provincial Parks Act, the Public Lands Act, and Special Places 2000, which deal with specific policy and

management, because we as a government and Albertans recognize the need to preserve our environment for present and future generations. K Country is part of that, and we know from protecting that area that it has served our recreation users well in the past. It is also looked upon as an area that protects our wildlife. Bill 208, which is proposing new borders along the created Elbow-Sheep wildland provincial park – that particular wildland park was recently nominated under Special Places 2000. I was just going to outline some of the unique characteristics of wildland recreation areas. So with that, I will continue with my planned speech of the day.

The term "wildland," Mr. Speaker, is a new category of park which is quite unique to Alberta. This designation serves to retain rather large areas of undeveloped land that are in a natural state by limiting facility development and interference with natural processes. This kind of park basically allows for a variety of backcountry recreation opportunities. Regulations are constantly being amended to support the designation of Elbow-Sheep wildland provincial park. Industrial development, including oil and gas, mining, and commercial timber harvesting, will not be allowed, and domestic grazing will not be allowed under this designation. This restriction is consistent with the prime protection zoning of the Kananaskis Country subregional integrated resource plan. This initiative and these restrictions show this government's commitment, as I said earlier, to protecting K Country.

Mr. Speaker, in total, recreation activities in this area are limited to 75 kilometres of nonmotorized backcountry trails, three designated backcountry campsites, one designated snowmobile loop trail, hunting, and trapping. There are no new proposed recreational developments at present.

The planning process for the management plan for this area will consist of representatives from the land and forest service, the natural resource recreation and protected areas division, and fish and wildlife management. It also includes contributions from the public and from stakeholders, which is consistent with this government's policy of consultation with the public.

Also bordering the proposed park area is Wind Valley natural area, which was also recently designated under Special Places 2000. Natural areas are one type of special place that preserves examples of our natural heritage and allows Albertans to enjoy the splendour of nature and learn about our environment. This designation protects the diverse landscape and helps maintain the wildlife habitat in this area. Management plans for natural areas will accompany regulations to restrict inappropriate activities for the area, with local communities providing input to that plan.

First designated by the Alberta Legislature in 1971, natural areas are protected public lands that are managed to maintain the natural characteristics of each site and are intended for low levels of public use. This Wind Valley natural area is now further protected under this designation of Special Places 2000. As you can see, the proposed park area, as well as all of K Country, is already well protected under existing legislation, policy, and management strategies. This government's commitment to Special Places 2000 is an assertion of this government's commitment to protecting K Country. The designation of Wind Valley natural area is part of the larger picture of Special Places 2000.

Special Places 2000 is a made-in-Alberta strategy that serves to complete by the end of the year 1998 a network of natural landscapes that represent the environmental diversity of Alberta's six natural regions. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Bow Valley, bordering K Country, is at the local committee stage for nomina-

tion under Special Places 2000. In fact, Special Places 2000 is truly a grassroots approach. Albertans who wish to nominate sites or become involved in the planning process may do so by nominating an area. The special places program to date has included 31 sites and consists of approximately half a million acres that have been added to Alberta's protected network.

Alberta's initiatives have not gone unnoticed. In 1996 an environmental group, the World Wildlife Fund, praised Alberta for its commitment to the special places program by raising the province's report card to a B rating for its progress in protecting wilderness areas. The increase of Alberta's rating was the largest given to any government in Canada. So you see, Mr. Speaker, this government is very committed to protecting the environment, and its initiatives are an affirmation of this commitment.

In addition to the proposed Kananaskis park in Bill 208, the area is further protected by current policy and management practices. The proposed park area is located in the Kananaskis-Spray resource management area. As outlined by the Kananaskis Country subcommittee IRP, the area is orientated to preserving the environmentally sensitive areas, including rare, fragile, or representative landscapes; the maintenance of natural landscapes; and the protection of critical wildlife ranges. Much of the proposed park, including Kananaskis and Spray Lakes valleys, is located in zone 1, prime protection, and zone 2, critical wildlife, as outlined in the Kananaskis Country subregional IRP.

Prime protection areas preserve environmentally sensitive terrain and valuable ecology and wildlife resources. It also serves to protect those portions of watershed receiving maximum amounts of precipitation and receiving most of the stream flow. Critical wildlife zones serve to protect range or water habitats that are crucial to the maintenance of wildlife, including bears, wolves, birds, and fish. Mr. Speaker, this government has a commitment to the protection of wildlife species and their natural habitat. In fact, K Country's greatest resource is its natural surroundings, which this government is committed to sustaining for future generations.

### 3:10

The Kananaskis-Spray management area already restricts many of the activities that are mentioned in Bill 208. No mining activities are taking place in the Kananaskis-Spray area. Petroleum and natural gas activities are also not occurring within the area. In addition, no domestic livestock grazing is occurring in the area. Mr. Speaker, clearly the area identified by Bill 208 and its subsequent proposals is covered by existing legislation, management, and policy.

In addition to the policy, management, and legislation protection of the area identified by Bill 208, Environmental Protection announced a recent management strategy for Alberta's recreation and protected areas program: Completing the Puzzle. This strategy outlines how to allocate resources to meet the expansion of the province's network of recreation and protected areas, which is expected to triple by the year 2000. Mr. Speaker, the main focus of this strategy serves to complete Special Places 2000 and is to place more emphasis on the protection of natural heritage sites, which represent 90 percent of the total land base of recreation and protected areas. Environmental Protection will also encourage private-sector operators and other partners, who already operate 92 percent of the recreation facility sites and represent 3 percent of the network's land base, to reinvest; that is, to reinvest in facility improvements which will benefit all visitors and tourists alike.

This management strategy balances prosperity with sustainable

development. With this plan in hand, Albertans can be confident that recreation and protected areas will continue to be enjoyed by all Albertans and visitors into the next century and beyond. The government realizes, with the increased demand for development in K Country, that some policies were developed some years ago and need to be adjusted for the current demands and the environmental concerns of today. As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, Environmental Protection is also currently undertaking the second phase of review to update its policies for recreational development in K Country.

The first phase of this review took into account the growth in neighbouring jurisdictions, changes in tourism and recreation, and the increased interest in private-sector development in the area. In keeping with this government's tradition of public consultation, the review included participation by the public and stakeholders, including two surveys and numerous focus groups, with over 50 interested groups attending. The second phase of the review will expand on this success. The review will be factored into any management direction or directive of K Country. As a result, Mr. Speaker, the revised recreation policy for K Country will serve to further protect all of K Country as well as the area identified under Bill 208 that is proposed here.

I am not sure what Bill 208 is trying to accomplish when many of its proposals are already covered under existing legislation, management directives, and policy. For instance, Mr. Speaker, clause 4 of Bill 208 sets up a park management plan to achieve the goals of the park, with public development of a plan. These proposals outlined in Bill 208 are already being pursued through the integrated resource plan and the public input into this plan that was so extensive. Furthermore, Albertans have citizen representatives that sit on the Kananaskis Country interdepartmental committee for ongoing input into Kananaskis Country management. The extensive first phase of the recreation policy review included surveys, focus and interest groups, and mail-in surveys, that were responded to by many Albertans. Again the sponsor does not consider the extensive participation of Albertans in the management of K Country as sufficient at this point.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a clear management strategy that is in place for K Country and is acting on that strategy and acting accordingly. We are not – I repeat: we are not – opening up K Country to major development, as the members opposite maintain we are doing and tried to promote during the recent election. All development will be consistent with current policies, management, and legislation. This government has made a concerted effort to protect all of K Country, including the area proposed for park status under Bill 208. No new development projects will take place during the K Country recreation review.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this Bill. While the intention of protecting the area designated by Bill 208 is not disagreeable, the fact of the matter is that the area is already covered by existing policy such as Special Places 2000 and specific legislation and management. Furthermore, I have problems with rescinding already approved projects, resulting in high financial cost to the parties concerned and to this government as well as dismantling established policy and procedures.

Mr. Speaker, the review of recreational development policy under way will be implemented in the management strategy for K Country. It is important that we continue to keep this area protected for generations to come.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

**Bill 209**  
**School Amendment Act, 1997**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise and move second reading of Bill 209. I've been trying for a long time to raise awareness on this issue to a level high enough that a debate and a discussion could take place. My first attempt was by way of a motion last year and then a private member's Bill earlier this year. Unfortunately, both died on the Order Paper. Finally, we have an opportunity to discuss funding for private schools by way of Bill 209. Even though the process of bringing forward a private member's Bill can at times be frustrating, I'm grateful to be a representative in a Legislature that has made provision for private members to bring forward ideas and concerns from their constituencies in this way.

Many have asked me why I've raised this particular issue and what it is I hope to achieve. It might be better to start with what I'm not trying to do. I did not bring this Bill forward to try and find a way to criticize or fragment the public or Catholic systems. I am a public school supporter. I attended public school here in Alberta, as have my sons. I did not bring it forward because I have an axe to grind with any group, board, or association dedicated to public education. Finally, I did not bring it forward because I wanted to curry favour with any special interest group.

Mr. Speaker, I brought this issue forward because many people in my original constituency of Three Hills-Airdrie and now again in the new constituency of Airdrie-Rocky View have asked me to, not just a few people but in fact 852 people. I have a stack of paper in my office that represents letters and phone calls I've received. We counted them and it's 852, and that's in the past four years. It dwarfs any other single issue that I as an MLA have tried to deal with. It certainly, I must say, would have been easier and less controversial to ignore this issue and to continue to send out form letters, but it would not go away. So I decided to try and deal with it in a slightly different way.

Maybe in the end the reason to bring the issue forward goes back to a discussion that I was having on a policy issue one day with one of my colleagues. I thought I had put forward a very reasoned and well-thought-out argument, and the gentleman blew my argument away with three words: clear, consistent, and defensible. When I apply those three words to this issue, I find the policy on private school funding hard to explain, inconsistent, and hard to defend.

We start with the word "clear." With regard to the existing formula, I'm not sure what is clear about 75 percent of the general revenue portion of the basic instructional block. How many of us know exactly the amount of the education costs that are paid from the general revenue fund versus the Alberta school foundation fund, or ASFF, which is the property tax portion of education spending? By the way, the general revenue portion of basic instructional funding is currently a moving target because of the reduction in the educational portion of the machinery and equipment tax, which is dropping on a yearly basis. Is the amount of the increase given to private schools this year equal to the reduction of machinery and equipment taxes on the ASFF portion of education spending? Well, I'd be surprised if many knew the answer. Generally speaking, no one talks about this formula, and there's a reason for that. It's 30 years old, and most people don't know about it.

3:20

The second area: is it consistent with other government

policies? Well, let's look at that. If you're a child in Alberta enrolled in an ECS program in the public, the Catholic, or yes, even the private system, you are entitled to 100 percent funding plus any additional funding for mild, moderate, or severely handicapped children in ECS. The interesting part here, of course, is that ECS is not a mandatory program, yet we choose to spend \$77 million a year on it.

If you are home schooled in Alberta under the public, the Catholic, or even the private system, you are entitled to full funding of \$990. If a child is in fact enrolled in the public, the Catholic, or the private system and is severely handicapped, that child will receive 100 percent of the additional \$8,910 allotted to the school to try and help that child. If you are an adult in Alberta and want to attend a private college teaching or providing training in an accredited course, the government of Alberta will in fact fund that institution 71 percent of the costs for that basic instructional block for that program. The original agreement between the government and the private colleges is for that amount to move to 75 percent. I have no reason to believe that that won't occur. It's simply been delayed because of government restructuring and deficit control.

The difference between these programs and private school funding is that they range from 71 percent for basic instructional costs for adults in college to 100 percent for ECS students, home schooling students, and severely handicapped children versus approximately 33 percent of total costs for children in grades 1 through 12 in an accredited private school.

I would like to take a look at the word "defensible." How do you defend a policy that is neither clear nor consistent and is virtually unknown to the majority of Albertans. The bigger question might in fact be: how can you defend funding private schools at all? For many of us it's a very difficult issue. To do this, you have to go back in our country's and our province's history, where fair and equitable funding for private schools is not in fact a new issue at all.

In 1946 private mission schools became eligible for a grant of \$550 per student plus \$1.50 per day for parents for each day their child attended a mission school. In 1954 provincial aid was given to private schools for handicapped children. Private schools were given funding in 1967 when Royal Assent was given to Bill 29 amending the School Grants Act to include payment of per pupil grants to private schools. That we fund private schools is an historic fact. We have a 50-year precedent for mission schools and a 30-year precedent for a more modern style of private school.

Ontario and Alberta took very different paths on how they funded private schools. The federal Parliament of 1867 was assigned powers to protect the rights and privileges held by Protestants and Roman Catholics with respect to schools in any of the provinces. The right of minority groups to Catholic or Protestant schools was guaranteed for Ontario by virtue of section 93 of the Constitution Act of 1867 and for Alberta by section 17 of the Alberta Act of 1905. In Ontario, Catholic schools were considered to be private and, in fact, were only publicly funded to grade 8 until the mid-1980s, when on a year-by-year basis funding was introduced for grades 9 through 12. An appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada contesting the Ontario government's decision to fund private Catholic schools was made by proponents of the public system. The Supreme Court decision of June 25, 1987, found that it was indeed constitutional to fund those private Catholic schools.

Meanwhile, back here in Alberta our government of 1905

guaranteed financial support equal to that available to the public schools for what we refer to as the Catholic system. This support has continued uninterrupted since 1905. Consequently, Catholics in Alberta, unlike their counterparts in Ontario or their Protestant counterparts here in Alberta, found little need to establish private schools. In 1905 the public system in Alberta was in fact a Protestant system, but as our province has changed and evolved to better reflect our diverse and multicultural population, our public school system changed and evolved as well.

The public and Catholic systems have tried to address some of the demand for diversity by our population. One example would be two of the Hebrew schools in Alberta. One is under the general control of the Catholic board in Calgary, and the other is under the general control of the Edmonton public board. We have an all-girls school – I believe it's out in Sherwood park – and a Logos Christian school here in Edmonton, and all of these are fully funded under the public system.

Government, wanting to assist in ensuring that all children in Alberta have opportunities commensurate with their abilities and their parents' desires, implemented charter schools. I believe there are eight of them now and more on the way. Each one of them is special for one reason or another. One is for very bright children. Another one's a charter to specialize in math and science, another for computer technology, another for athletes, and yet another for fine arts. There's another one for English as a Second Language located in Calgary.

The government said: we recognize that we have unique needs and diversity in our population, and if you want a charter for a special group of children, we will allow that. You can apply through your local school board to set one up, and failing that, you can in fact apply directly to the minister. Many people are truly excited about the possibilities and opportunities that charter schools will provide. Private schools, most of which are Christian schools, were hopeful that they, too, would be recognized as being able to qualify under the new charter legislation, but on closer inspection they discovered that the only significant reason that a group should not apply for a charter was because of religion. In a country where the Charter of Rights is so incredibly important, does it not get a little hard to defend this type of situation?

Upon reviewing our business plan for the Department of Education, I discovered that the mission statement for the department is in fact "The Best Education For All Alberta Students." They go further and cite 10 vision statements, many of which apply to all Alberta children, and in fact talk about opportunities for choice as well. Certainly with any of the statements they have in their vision goals, it's just as easy to apply them to a private school as it is to our public system. Vision statement 10 is about choice. Choice is important to parents and children in Alberta, and the Department of Education recognizes that, unless of course you're one of 16,000 students in an accredited private school.

There's a lot of criticism that floats around out there about private schools. I honestly believe that much of that criticism would be gone if more people understood more about them, went and visited them, and had a better understanding of what an accredited private school is. In order for a private school to qualify for even partial funding – they do receive one-third of total funding – they must in fact be accredited. They first apply to the minister, and if he gives them an accredited status, it does mean that they must employ teachers who are qualified and have a teaching certificate, that they must teach the curriculum as set

down by the Department of Education, and that they must provide the minister with audited financial statements. They must allow Department of Education inspectors access to their schools. They must participate in the same achievement tests that all children in the public and Catholic systems write. They must in fact be accountable not only to the minister but, more importantly, to the parents of the children in their school. Well, that's not a bad deal for \$1,815 per student per year compared to \$5,500 in the public system.

What we are talking about here today is no more and no less than children and the education of 16,000 children who are just as important to the future of our province as the 560,000 children in the public and the Catholic systems, 16,000 children who are just as important as those children that are in our charter schools.

The Bill that I've brought forward only partially addresses the anomaly in funding between school systems. The lines between Catholic and public schools – which include the Hutterian Brethren schools, the Hebrew schools, the Logos Christian schools, the all-girls school, and the charter schools – and the distinction of what makes a private school different from them is no longer clear. The funding formula originally worked out 30 years ago may in fact no longer have any relevance to our more modern and rapidly changing province.

Let's stop looking for the things that divide us and start looking at ways we can all work together to resolve this inconsistent, unclear, and indefensible policy. There are, after all, three things that do join us: parents' right to choose what is best for their children, the desire by all of us to ensure that all children are treated equally and that all are well educated, and the fact that we all pay taxes. As well, the 16,000 children, when they grow up, will all contribute to the economic well-being of our province.

I hope you'll consider supporting this first step in addressing this issue.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 209 . . .

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

3:30

#### **head: Motions Other than Government Motions**

##### **Taxation of Single-income Families**

507. Mr. Fischer moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to enter into discussions with the federal government to review the tax system to find ways to assist two-parent families where one parent chooses to remain at home.

Ms Blakeman moved that the motion be amended to read that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to enter into discussions with the federal government to review the tax system to find ways to assist families where one caregiver chooses to remain at home.

[Debate adjourned June 3: Ms Blakeman speaking]

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

I would point out to all members that there are approximately 34 minutes left for debate on this motion.



MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are still debating Motion 507, and I'm responding to that. I did distribute an amendment to this motion. I will allow people time to dig it out from their pile of papers and will make a few statements in the meantime. Then I'll return to it and move the amendment.

I'd like to respond to some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Wainwright. This motion has caused me a great deal of thought. I believe the motion itself has some merit, but when taken in the context of the remarks that were put forward, I struggle a great deal more in finding support for this motion. I think that intentionally or unintentionally the hon. member has insulted many Alberta women and certainly fathers of children with a number of his comments. I mean, he quite specifically talks about fathers not being able to "provide the love and care a baby needs to shape their personality." Certainly the feedback I have is that this was a very upsetting thing to say when we're talking about what is in the best interests of a child.

I think we need to be very clear that those choosing to work outside of the home or having to work outside of the home should not be reading that somehow they're not being good mothers or good parents and that their children are somehow bereft. I think that is not an accurate statement to be making of families and the way they choose to raise children in this province today. It's fine for the hon. member to praise permanent stay-at-home moms, but it's important not to dishonour all of the other mothers out there in that Alberta is supposed to be a modern society and accepting of people's choices. I would hope that those choices would be supported.

To return to the amendment that I had distributed a week ago, I would like to move that amendment at this time and speak to it. Essentially, the amendment proposes striking out "two-parent" so that that would just now read "families" and striking out "parent" and substituting "caregiver." The reason I am suggesting removing "two-parent" is that I think it's important that we recognize the many types of families which are supporting Alberta today. There is a wide variety, and I'm sure we can each think of examples in our own lives and in our communities. But just a few examples: for instance, an adult brother and his children are supported by their sister staying at home to care for children or perhaps a mother or even the father of that adult. Should we not be equal when attempting to address inequity? We need to be open to that.

MRS. BLACK: It's an amendment?

MRS. BLAKEMAN: Yes, a week ago. It was distributed a week ago.

I have included "caregiver" because I think it's important that we recognize the role of the person rather than designating the person that is doing it. We need that flexibility today. This could be a mother or a father or, as I said before, a sister, an aunt, any number of people either affiliated by blood or by marriage and now even by common law.

The point of this motion, if I understand it, is to get additional tax relief for the person who does not go into the workforce but stays at home to be a caregiver for the children. I think we also need to be open there to the caregivers of elderly parents or the caregivers of disabled adult children, and I believe that the way the original motion reads, it does not allow for the flexibility of those situations. If we're only looking at benefiting I guess what we'd call the traditional family, the two-parent, first-time-married couple where one person works and the other stays at home, this

in fact – and some would say unfortunately – is addressing a very small sector of the population now. I think if you factor in blended families and mixed families and all the other terminology they have, that becomes a higher group, but for first-time families like that, it's actually quite a small number.

I would like to point out that the federal government did recognize the disparity and has allowed an additional \$213 supplement for each child under seven. So obviously the federal government has taken steps to address this. Of course, this is in a situation where no child care expenses are claimed. The larger issue here is the loss of universality, which I had spoken of briefly before. I do mourn the loss of that. Many of us will remember the family allowance. Every mother, or father if they were the custodial parent, received a cheque each month. It seems the governments in this country decided this was a waste, and we now have a system of assistance for low-income families only.

So having made those remarks and explained why I'm asking for that amendment in an attempt to make this motion a bit more reflective of what we have in Alberta today, I will yield the floor over to my colleagues who wish to speak to this as well.

Thank you.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Motion 507 and address the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. The Member for Edmonton-Centre has suggested that the motion should be changed. The term "two-parent families" and "parents" would be removed if this amendment is accepted. I must speak against the amendment as I believe it affects the integrity of the motion.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the social aspect of this motion. When we examine the current biases of the tax system, there are obvious monetary costs. However, there are also definite human costs. There is a multitude of social science research that addresses the issue of early childhood development and the effect of a young child's environment on how that child will function in society as he or she grows up. The findings of these studies are consistent, indicating that the quality of care vis-à-vis a child's development psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually is consistently better when that care is from a parent as opposed to a paid caregiver. No matter what the facility, there is no equal for parental care in a child's formative years. The president of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Dr. Elliott Barker, has argued that nothing is more important in the world today than the nurturing that children receive in the first three years of life, for it is in these earliest years that the capacity for trust, empathy, and affection originate, and if the emotional needs of the child are not met during these years, permanent emotional damage can occur.

Mr. Speaker, a great number of serious problems in our society are steadily increasing in frequency and severity. Many of these, such as eating disorders, depression, youth gangs, teen pregnancy, and suicide, are directly linked to our youth. While problems such as these are never simple enough that we can pinpoint one cause, a lack of parental involvement is a significant contributing factor.

3:40

The national foundation for family research and health has argued that insecure bonding to parents during a child's formative years significantly increases the risk for emotional and behavioral problems later on in life. In addition, they note that regular

nonparental care for more than 20 hours per week decidedly affects social and emotional development, behaviour, and bonding in a negative manner.

Mr. Speaker, in our society and as a government are we not better, as parents of Kids First suggest, to attack the problem at its root as opposed to treating only the symptom? Attacking the root of the problem means going back to the child's formative years and ensuring that the care they receive will help them to develop into healthy and emotionally and socially secure adults. One of the most productive means of raising healthy children is through strong attachment to parents, best achieved when care is provided by a stay-at-home parent.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is the intent of the member opposite to amend this motion to allow nontraditional, nonnuclear families to benefit from the changes to the taxation system requested in this motion. I believe the member thinks that using the word "caregiver" instead of "parent" addresses her concerns. I trust I will be able to adequately explain to you why it does not.

This amendment allows anyone in the family who remains at home to be considered the caregiver. As I understand this terminology, it would allow brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and any member of the family to be considered as a caregiver. According to the research I have outlined, this is not in the best interests of the child. The parent is an integral part of the child's development, an integral part which cannot be addressed by another caregiver. In addition, I do not understand how the administration of a tax benefit to a caregiver who is a member of a family could be administered. The suggested amendment makes this nonspecific. Any family member could be included. The opportunity for abuse of such a system would be extraordinary.

Mr. Speaker, more and more families with children are two-earner families in which the children receive a great number of hours of nonparental care. To keep up a reasonable standard of living, many families feel pressured to have both parents participate in the workforce. Motion 507 is about giving families choices. It is not about pushing parents to stay at home any more than it is about encouraging them into the workforce. As to the motion, as it is currently worded, it acknowledges the social benefit of having one parent in the home and seeks ways to remove some of the barriers to stay-at-home parenting for those parents who choose to do so.

The individual, not the family, is used as the basic unit for determining that rate of taxation. This is well and good, Mr. Speaker, when the individual is single or even married without children. In these cases, the bias of the taxation system has no ill effect, but the situation changes somewhat when children become part of the family unit. In those cases the bias of the tax system does matter. The current taxation system clearly works to the detriment of parents, and it is this inequity that the motion is attempting to deal with. To remove the word "parent" from the motion would change the intent of the motion.

This bias, Mr. Speaker, creates a situation in which one-earner families are essentially subsidizing families in which both parents work. The combined tax liability of the two-earner couple is less than that of one-earner couples when the total taxable income is the same. There is, therefore, a failure on the part of our tax system to take into account that the income of a one-earner family supports more than just one individual. The tax system essentially ignores the other members of the family for whom the earned income is also intended. This not only puts one-earner families at a financial disadvantage, but it sends a message that the work of stay-at-home parents is not of value.

Mr. Speaker, this government should strive to ensure that the work of parents who choose not to participate in the paid workforce in order to raise their children is acknowledged as valuable. They are, after all, nurturing and educating the future of Alberta. Stay-at-home parents are involved not only in the home itself; they are also involved in the communities through volunteering. This work should not go unrecognized. This government has an obligation to the people of Alberta to ensure that our children grow up in the best possible environment. Part of that obligation should entail allowing families which choose to have one parent in the home to do so without the penalties that the current taxation system imposes.

I will not be supporting the amendment brought forward by the member of the opposition as it directly impacts the integrity of this important motion. Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have just a few brief comments regarding the amendment. I think that sometimes what we have to consider – we all know that families are not always traditional two-parent families, and we can't ignore that fact. I've just spent 14 years working in an environment where I see more kids who are not in a two-parent family, a Mom and Dad in the traditional role. That's not just as a result of, you know, sort of the daily interactions of my work, because these kids come to the attention of the police, but more in the schools, where there are many differences.

Many of these kids are high achievers. Many of these kids are living with an aunt and an uncle who are looking after them or a grandma and a grandpa. We just went through the grandparent Bill, and it was just expressed by grandparents in this province how much they care about their grandchildren, how much they want to be a part of their lives. We're talking about two-parent families. Well, it might be two grandparents; it might be an aunt and an uncle. They would be the caregivers. They wouldn't be the actual biological parents.

I think we have to give consideration to those concerns and look at this amendment as supporting all families, notwithstanding the fact that we all can't have the same environment to grow up in. We all know that. Not everybody in this Legislature has grown up with the two parents, Mom and Dad, at home or Mom at home and Dad at work. It just hasn't been that way for many, many years, not just the last 10 but for many numbers of years. So I'd like you all to give that some consideration when you're considering this amendment and to look down the road at the options for everybody and provide equality for everybody by accepting this amendment.

[Motion on amendment lost]

3:50

MS OLSEN: This is on the motion now, Mr. Speaker. In going through the actual motion itself and then the comments from the sponsor of the motion, I have some considerations and some concerns. My first point would be that given that the government itself has a rigid adherence to the economic model that exists, I'm wondering if the member has considered the economic implications of the forgone revenue from this type of motion. It seems to fly in the face of the fiscal initiatives driven by this government, and it's certainly not directed to low-income families. It seems to be more directed to the middle-class families. I'm just wondering where in this whole picture consideration has been given to that.

We know that the Alberta government has announced that low- and middle-income working families will get a tax break. That's about 200,000 children that'll benefit from that. That tax credit began in January of this year and will be fully implemented in January of '98. We also know that with the family tax credit, low- and middle-income families with children will receive a refundable personal income tax credit. That includes not just people who are working but also self-employment income. I'm just wondering if we think about that along with the issue of the tax credits that will benefit families with earnings up to a maximum of \$50,000, which is in the middle-income range. In the comments made by the hon. Member for Wainwright, he discussed the average single-worker family income in 1994 as being \$44,000, falling within that family income range. This tax credit certainly falls within that range, considering that the end threshold is \$50,000. So they would be included in that range.

My next point is that under the federal guidelines the federal child tax benefit provides tax-free payments to 85 percent of all Canadian families with children. This is, in their estimation, a \$5.1 billion investment, and it is an investment. Under that system families with a net income of up to \$25,000 receive a benefit, and for each additional child after that, then a further supplement of \$213 per child under age seven, and that's when no child care expenses are claimed. Certainly there is that income that goes to the middle-income families between \$25,000 and \$66,000. That's fairly substantial and offered by the federal government.

My next point is I'm a little concerned that this particular initiative, when we look back to the amendment, doesn't speak to the universality issue. It is inequitable. We want to promote things that are good for all Albertans. This is only good for a number of Albertans. It sort of indicates that maybe special treatment should be given to two-parent families where one parent chooses to remain at home. It's almost exclusionary of all those other families.

I'm concerned that there was no identified threshold when the member made his motion. He hasn't identified a threshold that he would consider. I would also have to note that maybe what might happen is he might want to encourage the federal government to raise the child tax benefit. There's research to say that certainly the current \$850 million that's been allocated by the federal government is not sufficient, that in fact it should be \$2 billion per year to make any significant inroads in the child poverty aspect of it. So if we're going to be inclusive and not exclusive, then maybe that's something that he could consider.

I guess the other aspect of it is more along the philosophical end of it. I'm concerned when we're looking at this kind of legislation. I know that the hon. Member for Wainwright did say that these comments out of *Hansard* were his beliefs.

There is no replacement for a mother and a mother's love. It is vital in the first year of a child's life. Not a dad nor an institution, government or otherwise, can provide the love and care a baby needs to shape their personality and develop their human character.

Well, I daresay that there are a number of fathers out there who are quite capable of providing a very stable, nurturing home, and I think they shouldn't be included or be part of a notion that they're an institution or government or that they fall within that same realm.

Mothers and fathers are certainly very, very caring. I think they're both capable of raising their children in a very responsible, nurturing manner. In fact, they take on the characteristics of both parents. So I think that it's what they learn from those

parents, be it a mother or a father. God knows there are numbers of children out there who are being raised by fathers and who are doing very, very well, and fathers are doing very well with them.

I have some concerns about this being directed to the notion that only mothers can be the parent that bonds with the child. Secure bonding can also come with aunts and uncles. In some instances where the parents aren't there – maybe they've passed away, or maybe there have been circumstances in their life where they can't raise their children – the children are better off with grandparents or an aunt or uncle. We have to accept the fact that those people acting in the roles of parents are equally as capable of bonding with the child as others. Now, that's not to say that those bonds are going to be the same, but certainly the guidance, direction, love, and nurturing that they would get from two people who cared about them and who were able to direct them down the right path would certainly be worth something to the child and certainly help them develop into a good citizen and develop some healthy human characteristics.

The member also noted in his opening comments that we need to determine our role as a government in allowing parents the choice to stay at home and raise their children. Well, the government doesn't have a role in allowing people to make those choices. People make those choices based on their needs, their beliefs, and the government should not have a role in this whole process. We have a government here that says they want to get out of people's faces, that they don't want to be in the face of the average citizen of Alberta or the average business or anything else. So why, then, does the government need to have a role in allowing parents to make a choice of how they raise their children? If one parent wishes to stay at home and the parents feel that's in the best interests of the family, then that choice is theirs to make. It should not be influenced at all by the government.

I guess I've already discussed the issue of one-earner families. In 1994 their family income was \$44,000 compared to the two-earner family at \$58,000. The comment from the member was: "This is a sacrifice many families freely make." That is the bottom line, that it is a sacrifice many families make freely. I think that when we all decided to make this leap into politics from whatever job we were doing prior to this, we all made sacrifices, and so did our families. We have to acknowledge that. You have 63 members, and most of them are away from their homes and their families. That is a sacrifice. That is a choice you made. It's a choice we all make.

4:00

The other end of that is that we make the choice to be with our families when we can. You know, it's easier for some than others. As a single parent I made every effort to be at my son's school. I worked shift work. I coached his basketball team for four years. We happened to win silver and gold medals. I was very involved with him in everything he does. I was teaching computers at his school. I was also working 10-hour shifts and going to court. But those are the decisions that we make as parents. We don't need the government to help us make those choices. Those are the decisions we make when we have one person staying at home. We will give up salary. We will give up some things that we might otherwise want to have. But if those are important, then that's what you choose to give up, and you have to live with those decisions. Those are no more government decisions than many other issues that we have.

The member is correct: parents should be respected for their decision to stay at home and raise their children. I absolutely

agree with that. We shouldn't be chastising parents either way. Those are choices and decisions that we have to make. If the decision is to stay at home, then nobody should be criticized for doing that, because that is their choice. If the decision is for a parent to work, that is also their choice, and we've all made those choices. We've all gone through those discussions with ourselves on what's best for our family.

Given those comments, I find it very difficult, I guess, to support the initiative, because I believe it is not equitable. It doesn't speak to everybody, and I think that's what we have to look at. We should attempt as people in this Legislative Assembly to make things equal and make things work towards equity, and this motion does not work towards that at all.

With that I'll close. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I was just in the process of interrupting the hon. member. Under Standing Order 8(4) I must call the question to conclude debate on the motion under consideration at this time.

[Motion carried]

### Multiculturalism and Human Rights Commissions

509. Ms Blakeman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish an independent Alberta multiculturalism commission and an independent Alberta human rights commission separate and distinct from each other.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: It's my special day today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to propose Motion 509. [interjections] I can hear the encouragement from the hon. members across the way. Thank you so much.

This motion has been put forward in response to the tremendous community feedback we've received on Bill 24, which was the Individual's Rights Protection Amendment Act, which essentially rolled together the Multiculturalism Commission, the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, the Women's Secretariat, and the Human Rights Commission to create the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund. [interjection] At least women were viewed as citizens; I'll be grateful for the small mercies there. It was done against the wishes of Albertans at the time, and certainly there is a poll, that's fairly widely known, that 53 percent of Albertans were opposed to this. I find it really interesting that through all the consultation that this government does, it then ignores its own poll.

The other group that had a lot of input into this Bill was the Human Rights Review Panel through its Equal in Dignity and Rights. That had a coalition of over 100 Alberta groups backing it, and some fairly significant, impressive, learned, and experienced Albertans were involved in that. It's been a year since Bill 24. I've gone back through the archives and looked at the letters received and the comments in the media and the other ways in which people have communicated with us about this. Albertans still want a strong Human Rights Commission. They want a Human Rights Commission that is separate and distinct. They do not want it rolled together into a multiculturalism, human rights, and citizenship education fund. They believe that there is a need for an independent Human Rights Commission.

Each of the groups that is connected to the sectors that were

rolled together feels quite strongly that their sector has been diminished. I have gone back and spoken with particularly the multicultural groups to make sure what their opinion on this is today as compared to a year ago. They feel very strongly that their issues have been buried, not heard, not promoted, and that it has no status at all.

Now, I'm sure that the hon. Minister of Community Development, under which this multicultural, rolled-together education fund falls, would say to me that she hasn't heard from any groups that were upset with the current state, but I have. These groups do not feel comfortable coming to the current government, Madam Minister. The human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund is headed by a sitting Conservative MLA, and I've certainly heard very good things said about the chair of that fund and have a good deal of respect for her. But it's always followed with the comments that it is a minister representing the government and that they don't feel comfortable going there. They don't feel that they will be heard and that particularly if there's a dispute between human rights and multiculturalism or indeed with anything in the Department of Community Development, there would not be an equitable hearing. Whether that in fact would be the truth or not – and I can't speculate on that; that is speculation – that is certainly the way the groups feel.

They also pointed out to me that grants have been cut fairly dramatically and that they are afraid that if they say anything, they would be punished for it and that grants would be further cut. I know that would be very disturbing news to the minister. She and I have spoken on this before. It may not be right and may not be true, but groups do feel this way. This government and this minister I think have to ask themselves what they might have done to make people afraid to approach them.

The other comment I've heard about this fund is that it is not arm's length from government, and that was one of the issues that was brought up a number of times during the debate on Bill 24. The community feels that this lack of distance deters individuals from pursuing either multicultural issues or from bringing complaints to the Human Rights Commission. It was also brought to me that if the issues were raised, there's not the staff or the resources to address them. There were very strong feelings that this educational fund cannot deal effectively with women's issues or with multicultural issues.

### 4:10

There were also a lot of questions that were asked about the money that was saved. People really felt – I'm trying not to use a colloquialism here – they had ended up much poorer for it. The current budget is now, I think, \$1.1 million, but before they were rolled together, between the multicultural, the human rights, and the women's issues sectors overseen by the government, we were talking something closer to \$5 million or \$6 million, it's my understanding. I'm not exactly sure of those figures. But the comment that was made very strongly to me yesterday was: where did this money go? All of this money was pulled out of these sectors. People didn't want it to happen. It was done against their expressed views, and what is left is an educational fund with very little money in it, very little resources to look after anything and, as I'll address later, some questions about in fact what the educational fund is doing.

Another point that was raised is that the grants to the community agencies have been cut dramatically, and at the same time community groups, particularly in the multicultural sector and to a lesser extent in the human rights agencies, have taken over some of the programming that was cut that used to be done by the

department staff. One example I was given was that a group had been getting close to \$75,000 a year from a combination of the federal and provincial grants, and it was indicated to me that most of that was provincial. They're now getting \$15,000. So they're getting significantly less money, and they have taken over quite a bit of the programming. Where have the savings gone? Not to dignity. Not to equality.

How has the integrity of each of these agencies been maintained by the passing of Bill 24 and the establishment of the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund? Where are the education programs? Where are the posters or booklets? I haven't heard or seen anything. Women, multiculturalism, and human rights appear to have disappeared in this province. I'm wondering if the government can show improvement in tolerance and understanding and a reduction in racism since Bill 24 was passed. Can the government show a better understanding and promotion of human rights in Alberta since Bill 24?

The final point I'd like to make is that the then Minister of Community Development, as this Bill was being debated a year ago and after Bill 24 was passed in fact and the Multiculturalism Act was canceled, said that this was necessary as part of our evolution and going into this time of fiscal restraint. The point that's being made to me is that now, according to the government, we don't seem to be in a financial crisis anymore. Can we please evolve upward and into a more equitable, humane society, which values and promotes multiculturalism and works against intolerance and racism in all forms?

Therefore, I would ask that you support Motion 509, which does ask and "urge the government to establish an independent Alberta multiculturalism commission and an independent Alberta human rights commission."

Thank you for the time today.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand to speak in support of the motion.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. CAO: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was busy writing a note.

THE SPEAKER: That's fine. The Chair has recognized the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in support of the motion that's on the table in front of us. There are a couple of observations I want to make straight off. I think that my colleague just a moment ago did an excellent job of highlighting some of the challenges confronting the promotion of multiculturalism in this province. I think there are many Albertans that lament the elimination of the Multiculturalism Commission, the extinguishment of the Multiculturalism Act. Albertans will remember how hard the Liberal opposition had to fight in the spring of 1996 over Bill 24 to even ensure that the word "multiculturalism" appeared in the title and in the name of the commission, because the government certainly had to be dragged to that point kicking and screaming.

I think some Albertans would say: do we need two independent commissions? Do we need an independent commission focused on multiculturalism? Do we need an independent commission focused on human rights? I'm going to propose something of a

compromise, although I support the motion. It seems to me that the most important thing is the independence. To those members who say that perhaps they have some difficulty with two different commissions, which is important, I'm going to say that they have an opportunity to move at least partway, and that is to acknowledge that the single most important part of this motion is to create a source of advocacy for promoting tolerance and understanding and a respect and a recognition of our multicultural heritage and our multicultural character and to be able to provide advocacy to promote those things in a way that is in fact independent of government, perceived as being independent of government.

We hear members sitting in their chairs and questioning why this would be important. Well, I refer all members to what I call exhibit A. It was the memo from Elaine McCoy. This would be 1992. She was the Minister of Labour, the minister responsible for the Human Rights Commission. She wrote a letter to Ms Wendy Kinsella, who was then the legal counsel to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. She instructed the Human Rights Commission of this province that they would not entertain complaints on the basis of a particular kind of discrimination. To any member in this Assembly who says that there's no history of interference by the provincial government in an operation of the Human Rights Commission, I'll be happy to fax to them this afternoon a copy of that. I believe it was a 1992 memorandum.

Let's recognize that the current Minister for Community Development has asserted consistently that she chooses not to interfere in the workings of the Human Rights Commission. I respect that and I acknowledge that. I don't want to in any way suggest that the minister has suggested she has an intention of interfering. [interjection] But it's a question that would be apparent even to my friend from Medicine Hat. Mr. Speaker, if you take the fact it has happened before – you see, we may not be so fortunate with the next minister who occupies this portfolio. Albertans may be darn lucky right now we've got the current minister.

MRS. BLACK: Are you giving her a compliment?

MR. DICKSON: Indeed I am, because this minister warrants compliments with her forthrightness in the House and with her commitment to the goals of her department.

You know, we're not always going to be so lucky. We know that it's simply a pen stroke away from a change on the part of the Premier, and we may have the current Minister of Energy suddenly as the Minister of Community Development. Need I say what panic there will be in the streets of Alberta if that distinguished parliamentarian were suddenly given the power to oversee the Human Rights Commission? But seriously, I choose not to dwell on that. I don't want to parade the horrors anymore before Albertans, because I'm an optimist and a positive guy, and I want to focus on the things that we do have the power to change.

The point is this: Albertans have to have a sense of confidence. It's not enough for me, somebody who has seen the current minister in operation for five years – I know she's a woman of integrity and a woman of great moral responsibility, but other Albertans don't know that outside of the Hanna-Oyen circuit. There are lots of people around this province who don't know what kind of a minister we've got. That's why it's important, why it's so important, that we take this commission and ensure that it is seen as being absolutely independent of government.

4:20

This was a recommendation when the Equal in Dignity report was written. That was the single most important recommendation,

that came as a unanimous recommendation from the Premier's handpicked task force after extensive, provincewide consultation: we need an independent commission. That's what all of the organizations in this province involved with the promotion of human rights and respect for multiculturalism said with the loudest possible single voice. That was confirmed later when the Canadian Mental Health Association retained Dennis Anderson.

We're fortunate that the current Member for Calgary-Currie is a very effective legislator, but her predecessor, Dennis Anderson, was also a very effective parliamentarian. It was Dennis Anderson who wrote a report called *Fractured Voices*. This report had a very creative idea: taking the Human Rights Commission and some of the other citizen complaint offices like the Farmers' Advocate and the Health Facilities Review Committee and the Ombudsman and rolling them together into a single complaints office. At first reading that was something of a seductive idea. On closer reading there were problems with it.

What the *Fractured Voices* report made crystal clear is that you need a single voice, an independent voice that's perceived as being independent of government. The reality is that we don't have that in Alberta now, and we need it. Until we have that, Alberta will continue to be saddled with a reputation and a practice which, frankly, do not serve Albertans well, who for the most part are fair minded and I think are generous in spirit. I've often said that I think in many respects when it comes to human rights and multiculturalism, Albertans deserve more than what they've in fact been served up in terms of government policy over the last five years. To me it's just really important that we listen to the recommendation in the *Equal in Dignity* report, that we listen to the recommendation in the *Fractured Voices* report from the Canadian Mental Health Association, that we listen to the voices of all of these disparate but respected agencies and organizations around the province and act.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Centre pointed out a few moments ago, let's recognize that it's not just the symbolic importance of the commission; we also have the education fund. This is where the government, in my respectful view, made a colossal blunder in the spring of 1996. We had the chance then to create that education fund and make the fund distant from government, but the government said: "No. What we're going to do is leave this under the control of the minister. We're going to have a committee set up. There's an MLA chairing that." I have enormous respect for the MLA chairing that committee. Nonetheless, it's still a member of government, and there's nothing that can be done that changes that fact. So we not only do not have an independent Human Rights Commission, but the education fund – that fund that had originally been the \$2.2 million for multiculturalism, that was slashed in half to \$1.1 million, that was transferred to a human rights, multiculturalism, and citizenship education fund – that money is absolutely under the thumb of the minister through the agency of a government MLA. So who could possibly say that we have the requisite kind of independence, the requisite kind of distancing from government?

I think this is something we will yet have to move to. I remember going to a meeting in Calgary a year ago with representatives from those people that the Premier would describe at the time as being something other than severely normal. It was not only representation from the Calgary United Way. It was representation from a number of some of the most prestigious organizations in Calgary: the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, Catholic Immigration. There was a whole range of very respected

organizations. These are the people that the Premier was prepared to discount so dismissively by saying that he was only listening to severely normal Albertans.

Well, I think a whole lot of Albertans took offence at that statement and want to see an independent commission. It might be ideal to have both a multiculturalism commission and a human rights commission, but the bare minimum has got to be an independent commission. No amount of protestation on the part of the current minister is going to change the perception that this commission isn't working for Albertans; it's working for the government.

I can tell the hon. minister I don't know how many individuals have raised with me as the human rights critic their frustration that after they've gone through the process, the Human Rights Commission has one focus now, and that's to clear up the backlog. It doesn't matter what's fair; it's simply: get the backlog eliminated. What happens is you have an investigator who concludes and says to people: "Yes, there's a problem here. You've been discriminated against. The Act has been violated, but we've negotiated a \$250 or a \$500 settlement on your behalf." My constituent or those people who approach me say that this isn't very fair; \$250 and \$500 not only is no reasonable compensation, but it's certainly the slightest tap on the wrist to the offending employer or landlord. Mr. Speaker, these people don't get their day in court, and that's what they're looking for.

We're in a situation where when the director decides that there's going to be no further review and this thing never gets to the three-person hearing panel constituted under the Act that was amended last spring, we fall into a void. There's just a dead end. We have all of these people – and a number of them I've been in conversation with just in Edmonton recently – who've been writing the Minister of Community Development and saying: "Madam Minister, you tell us you're independent. Tell us what steps you're prepared to take to ensure that in these kinds of cases, where complaints simply get shunted off on the side rail with an insulting recommendation for settlement . . ." Where's the leadership in dealing with those kinds of cases and in changing our system of dealing with complaints so that there's a sense of fairness that people have and a sense of confidence they're being treated fairly and equitably?

It all comes back to independence. Until we have independence, we will never have and can't go around and say that we've got the strongest and fairest human rights regime that should exist in this province. Albertans deserve better. We have a long tradition. This province was settled by African-Americans coming from Oklahoma because they were persecuted there. They came to Amber Valley, where in fact they were treated as individuals. We had people coming from Utah who were persecuted because of their religion and took refuge in Alberta. That's the settlement pattern of this province. Why is it that we repudiate that long and honourable and distinguished history by refusing to have an independent commission? [interjection] You know, Mr. Speaker, some people are of the sense that if you have legislation over here that says the kind of words that are nice and reassuring sounding, the job is done. Well, it's not. You need somebody to animate those words. You need somebody to apply them and to enforce them.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business is concluded.

4:30

*head:*           **Government Motions  
Adjournment of Session**

22. Mrs. Black moved on behalf of Mr. Havelock:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the First Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

MR. DICKSON: I'm happy to enter debate on the motion just introduced by the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. A couple of observations I'd make straight off, Mr. Speaker. The first one is that it's been interesting that in this province, at least in recent history, we've had a convention of having a spring session that typically goes for about three or three and a half months and a fall session. What we're looking at and what we've seen since June 15 of 1993 is that every conceivable opportunity and effort has been taken to truncate, abridge, shorten, reduce the amount of consideration by the Legislative Assembly of the activities of the government of Alberta, and that takes several forms.

Invocation of closure: the fact that the current Premier has been responsible for invoking closure at least 20 different times – 20 different times – which is an absolute record when we think that the number of times closure was invoked in the entire Lougheed years was something in the order of six occasions. What's happened is we have legislation that delegates virtually everything to secret lawmaking by Lieutenant Governor in Council. We have situations where we often don't have key government people in the House to answer questions, to defend legislative initiatives that are being undertaken in their name. All of these things undermine the role of the Legislative Assembly, the role of members, and ultimately hurt Albertans. They prejudice a full and vigorous discussion of issues.

What's most interesting is that when members of the opposition stand up, there are people in this Assembly that don't appreciate that the currency the opposition has is one of legislative time. That's the opportunity we have to analyze Bills and motions, to discuss them, to dissect them, and hopefully do that in a way to allow the bigger community time to react. What's going to happen? This government seems so focused and so preoccupied on abridging the time of legislative deliberation that it seems they're blinded to the bigger issue.

We've got a government that adopts a business model that is so fixated with saving costs, there's absolutely no or scant consideration paid to the value of democracy, a process that is by its definition not always timely, not particularly efficient, and not clean and cut and dried. What happens is that's the system we've got, and arguably it's the best system anybody has yet developed to be able to govern a group of free men and women. But this government doesn't understand it. I'm extremely disappointed that this motion comes in.

There's been some talk on the part of responsible government members, who should know better, that the opposition is filibustering on different Bills. The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that I challenge the government members to review the debate of my colleagues and to look at what I suggest are creative analyses, thoughtful consideration and analysis of Bills that have come forward.

I'm proud of my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, because, you know, with a much reduced research budget, they have continued to find

oversights, and I'll give you an example. The other day we looked at Bill 11, that to my recollection was the Bill that would have a Lieutenant Governor in Council overrule the will of the Legislative Assembly, to be able by regulation to overrule a statute of the province.

This motion that sets the stage for closing this spring session of the Legislature in fact is absolutely consistent with those other government initiatives that we've seen. This is a government that simply doesn't understand. This is the only place where Albertans are all represented. It's not Tory standing policy committees. It's not government-appointed task forces. It's in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Government House Leader.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, relevance, *Beauchesne* 459. Now, I'm not entirely familiar with the extent to which one can wander from the motion that's before them with respect to a motion to adjourn. I don't know how broad the debate can be, but I certainly haven't heard a lot on the issue of adjournment. I've heard specific Bills referenced, et cetera. Perhaps some direction would be helpful so that at least I can understand how much one can wander with respect to this issue.

MR. DICKSON: Well, simply on the point of order, the motion is clearly the first step, Mr. Speaker, in adjourning the current sitting of the Legislative Assembly. It's a debatable item, and it surely follows that members should be entitled to talk about the consequential impact of ending the spring sitting now and the significance of it and to be able to lament or be critical of it. I'd submit that that's simply part of the debate, and I'm attempting to join debate on that very issue.

THE SPEAKER: Does anyone else want to participate on this point?

The Assembly has before it a motion, and a motion is a debatable item, and it comes before the Assembly. The request here is

that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the First Session . . . it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined.

Now, hon. members can give any kind of legitimacy to the arguments that they have either for or against this particular motion. So, hon. Government House Leader, there has to be a wide range of latitude, because the Chair never knows what all the background is that's being put on the table in order to arrive at the conclusion.

Now, the hon. Government House Leader knows from his own legal training that he might in fact provide testimony for days on end in order to come to a one-line conclusion. In this case, there are 20 minutes allocated to each individual to participate in the debate on the motion, and I would certainly encourage members to come to a point sometime. Sometime. But if it takes 19 and a half minutes for an hon. member to come to such a point, unfortunately the rules provide for that. So we shall sit back and enjoy and see what the conclusion is. The Chair will attempt to have the hon. member steer the ship towards the motion before us.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. If this were a lawsuit, this would be the time we'd move for a nonsuit for lack of evidence provided by the person moving the motion.

### Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: The point is simply this: we've talked in this Assembly before about different initiatives on the part of this government that erode what used to be a very robust democracy in this province. Short-circuiting legislative consideration is probably the most graphic evidence of that particular campaign. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans pay us the same salary whether we're sitting in our constituency offices or whether we're in this place. The reality is that Albertans expect that lawmaking is something they all have some insight and input into. The reality in Alberta is that we don't. This government is moving to abridge even that limited opportunity we have. I think it's disappointing, I think it's reprehensible, and I simply wish more Albertans appreciated the gravity of what the government is about.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I rise to speak against this motion as well. The government tries to construe this motion as being little more than administrative, cursory, without particular substance or impact on things larger than the kinds of details that they bring to us in their legislation. Of course, a motion such as this to bring the House to a close has much further ranging implications than the Government House Leader just moments ago would construe. This motion will very likely lead to the closing of a legislative session shorter than any other spring session that I have been involved in in the 11 years that I have had the honour to serve in this Legislative Assembly with the Speaker himself.

4:40

MR. HAVELOCK: So we've been efficient.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, the House leader says that that can be equated with efficiency. In fact, what I would equate that with is a government that is running from those things that are offered so significantly by the Legislative Assembly, which, I should point out, has existed far longer in this province than this government.

The Legislative Assembly is the place where government is held accountable. It's held accountable through many processes, one of which is question period. No manager can manage as efficiently without questioning as they will and do with questioning. The intensity of our concern with this motion is heightened by virtue of the fact that the government is taking specific steps to move away from fall sessions. In doing this, they reduce the ability for Albertans to hold them accountable through this opposition and through their own backbench members, who have been asking on some occasions some relatively difficult questions of their cabinet ministers. It also demonstrates a diminishing of the importance that they place upon this place in general. Every time we stand and speak in this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, it is a symbol and representative of how this House holds dear and protects the right to freedom of speech in this province and in our democracy.

I'd like to read a couple of excerpts, if I could, Mr. Speaker, from a book that I find very, very powerful in its vision for Canada and its vision for government in a province like Alberta. It's called *A Canada of Light*, by B.W. Powe, who was a very creative and extremely intelligent Canadian writer. He says:

What is the perception that many people have of those in power . . .

It is one of absence, of automatic actions, of compulsion, and the uttering of clichés. It is of directions that were not vividly imagined, honestly debated, prepared for, and constantly reevaluated.

He says as well that

leaders often speak of the cynicism and sourness of Canadians. I hear people speak about the disconnection from human affairs in those who govern. It may be that the people feel this way because Canada had once been an example of a state where government was necessary for the survival of the country's social structure.

He also says by way of a solution, a step to begin to rectify these two problems – and there's much more in this book – that

we must ask for a visionary pragmatism from our politicians and leaders, an engagement that emerges from the debate about values, the principles of power, the complexities of influence, the spending of our wealth.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, what these excerpts, these passages talk about is the tremendous cynicism that people feel about the process. They feel that for a number of reasons: one, because they feel that their institutions, their leaders are absent, deal in clichés, and in automatic actions. Directions are not honestly debated, they're not properly prepared for, and they're not properly re-evaluated. He makes the point that this Canada has people feeling cynical about it perhaps, and certainly Alberta, because government has lost its way and its important role in protecting and promoting a social structure. He says that what we need to begin to cure this is a debate, an engagement that emerges from the debate about values. When you close off debate in the House after eight weeks by using closure, when normally a spring session is three and a half months, what you do is feed into that cynicism, promote that absence, underline the clichés, forget the engagement in a debate about values that will fashion and forge the future of this country.

For this government to say that we have no work to do, what they're saying is they have no ideas about the future. They may think they have no work to do, but there are huge and fundamental challenges, Mr. Speaker, at stake. We'd like to stay and debate public versus private education. We'd like to stay and debate the quality of education that this minister is allowing to deteriorate in our province. We'd like to stay and debate the importance of public health care versus the erosion that private health care will cause our health care system. These are fundamental values about the future of this province.

They say they have no work to do. What about the environment, Mr. Speaker? The government has brought us back 10 or 15 or 20 years in environmental policy, when the future of this province, its economy, its quality of life, its decency, its dignity, what it values is premised very much, will be founded very much on the legacy we leave our children for the environment.

There are issues about how people are treated fairly or unfairly as workers in this province. Why don't we stay and debate that? Why doesn't the government bring in a motion about that and allow us to stay and debate that?

Mr. Speaker, I have been in this Legislature for 11 years. I have respected this Legislature, as frustrating as it may be from moment to moment, for its traditions, for the values that are underlying, for what it says about the democratic process in this province and in this country. People have literally died, are literally dying today to have an institution like this that can be so easily dismissed and disregarded and diminished by a government that has grown arrogant in its 25 years of governing.



We are not going to have a fall session, Mr. Speaker. We are getting out earlier than any spring session I've been involved in before. We have a House leader who mentioned earlier on, admitted in this session that in fact free votes aren't really free votes in his caucus. We have a Bill that's been amended with a clause that will actually allow a minister to overrule enacted legislation. We have regulations that will diminish the impact and the purview of freedom of information, and we have a government that is arrogant about shutting this place down eight weeks after it started in the face of huge issues that need to be addressed on behalf of the people of this province.

We get paid well, Mr. Speaker. We have a huge responsibility that requires that we take Albertans' interests and debate them publicly in a place where they can be heard and where they can be listened to, where they can be presented and argued, and while it's frustrating and it's a grinding process and it makes people upset, it is the very process that allows our society to progress with civility and with decency, not precipitously but in a slow paced manner that has given Canada and Alberta some of the greatest political stability in the world today.

When we see governments beginning to throw away and diminish and undermine the very tenets of this place, we see governments that have placed themselves above the democratic process and above an institution, which is, yes, a building and a concrete place but an institution that's far, far greater than that. It is the symbol of civility. It is the symbol of freedom of speech. It is the symbol of a stable and paced way to deal with huge problems and huge issues facing the people of this province.

I don't think it's too much to ask, Mr. Speaker, that we should be able to come to this Legislative Assembly and not have our debate closed because of the impatience and the petulance of a government that's arrogant, that is overwhelmed by its own importance, that in fact believes its own press. I don't think that at a time when we have some of the highest rates of child poverty in the country, the fourth highest rate of single mothers living in poverty, the lowest minimum wage – we have increased numbers of jobs but their quality is diminishing. We have reduced quality of education. We have threats to our health care system, threats to our public education system, hospital wait lists. [interjections]

4:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and hon. Minister of Environmental Protection, you'll be invited to speak here. I'll put you on the list now, but right now we're hearing the words of the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: I don't think it's too much to ask, Mr. Speaker, that we have enough time to debate some of these issues significantly and properly before this government stops and shuts this Legislature far too soon. It is our responsibility, it is our duty, and it's not too much to ask any of us to stay in here and wrestle with some value-based issues and some value-based decisions that need open, public debate in this province.

Of all the things I've seen this government do, Mr. Speaker, one of the most frightening and disturbing is the kind of dismissal, the way in which they are dismissing, the way in which they are diminishing the democratic process in this province. They should be ashamed of themselves.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've come to learn a lot about this Legislature in the last eight weeks and can only look forward to learning much more. I'm concerned that we now have a motion in front of us to bring this Legislative Assembly to a closure with no thought or date as to when we might reconvene. Having walked through some of the processes in the Assembly, I become concerned when I look at how the government has chosen to operate this Assembly. They make the decisions. They decide on which Bills will be heard. They don't allow debate. They actually, in fact, chastise the opposition for doing their job. We're here to speak on behalf of Albertans every bit as much as the government side is here to speak on behalf of Albertans. As the Leader of the Opposition was speaking right now, we had comments coming back and forth. I wonder how much respect people on the other side actually have for this institution. I'm concerned that, you know, this is just a big joke for some people.

Well, there's debate to be had. There's debate not only on your Bills; there's debate on other Bills. There's debate on other issues. As arrogant as some people may be on the other side, it's not just yourselves sitting there frustrated because you're 350 kilometres away from home or whatever it is. You choose to want to end the session and not be held accountable for those things that are very important to Albertans.

I know that when I was out door knocking – and I know I'm not the only one that heard this during the campaign. You would knock on a door, and people would say: "Oh, I'm not going to vote," or "Why should I vote for you? You're no different than anybody else? All politicians are the same. You get into office and forget about us out here." I don't want to forget about the people that I'm here to represent, and I choose to want to be the voice for the constituents who elected me. They elected me for a reason, and that is to be their voice, and that's what I choose to be in this Legislature and outside this Legislature, to debate the issues that are important to them. In my constituency poverty is important to them. In my constituency health care is very important to them and so is education. They have a right to have those issues debated in this Legislature.

You know, people talk about the lack of civility in this Legislature, and we all contribute to it, every one of us. But I wonder what would really go through the minds . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Speak for yourself, Sue.

MS OLSEN: I did include myself, and I think there are others in here that also have to look at themselves and look at what they're doing.

I urge this government to call this House back in the fall so we can look at legislation that will die on the Order Paper, that won't be there. I don't understand why we're now pushing through any number of Bills that will never get debated. Why are we doing this? Are we doing it just so it looks good? Is it just all for the image so the public will say: "Well, you know, look what our government's done. They've brought in 40 Bills."? Half of them got debated or got any amount of debate.

The issue the other day that arose when we were virtually accused of killing debate on a Bill was appalling. We have the right to debate. We have the right to be the voice. I have learned a lot from my colleagues in this House, and I'm quite happy about the debate that does go on when it occurs. I believe that we've had the ability to have some impact, that our questions have not been irresponsible. I wonder. Maybe if the folks on the other side would end up entering into debate, they might not be so

bored. They might not see a need to have to get out of here. It might also help hone everybody's skills in here and really have them sit and think about who they're representing and what they're supposed to be doing in here.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down and let one of my colleagues speak.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Government Motion 22 as well. I see the motion as seeking adjournment of this House, and the proposal to adjourn the House in the near future is something that I look at with mixed feelings. Being a new member of this House, I have been of course trying to learn a lot within a very short time, and in a sense, the news that the House might adjourn soon suggests a sense of relief that might come with that adjournment. On the other hand, this House is the place where the collective voice of Albertans is heard – and it's the only place where it can be heard meaningfully – a voice that can be paid attention to. So I am of the view that adjourning the House at this point would be depriving Albertans much too soon after the last election to continue to see their voice represented in this House. [interjections]

I know that hon. members who are trying to intervene in the debate are perhaps looking for opportunity to go to the golf courses. I know their lifestyles. They're well heeled. They seem to miss the opportunity to go back to do things that they really like to do. This seems to be a side business for them but not for me. I come into politics after a long career in academia, and I take my job seriously, and I know that Albertans want to take this House seriously. To put this House away as soon as the government members can is, in a sense, voting against the democratic rights of Albertans to be heard in this place. [interjections] But I have. I spoke last Thursday, Mr. Speaker, in your presence rather passionately about how the legislative powers in this province are being whittled away in favour of the executive authority of this government.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Decorum**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, if you wish to enter into debate, I'll put your name after the Minister of Environmental Protection and perhaps before the name of the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition is being reminded he's already spoken once on this issue. We wish to hear now from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and no one else.

#### **5:00 Debate Continued**

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member of the Official Opposition referred to the possibility that there may not be a fall session, that the government benches and the front bench may in fact seriously be considering simply writing off the fall session. I make a proposal to the hon. Government House Leader. If he stands up and undertakes to call this Assembly in the fall for a 10-week period, let us say, I'm willing to vote with him for this motion. If, however, he is unable to do this, I will vote against this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WHITE: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I really thought I was second in

the order. I thought one of the ministers, particularly the Minister of Environmental Protection, was on your speaking order. Oh, but no, no, no. That would be too much like speaking in public about something that is quite important.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the motion.

MR. WHITE: Oh, yes, of course, sir. This is about democracy. This is about the motion before us, Motion 22. I mean, this is unbelievable, that we have nobody to speak for it. I mean, here we have pounding of the desks. We want to go home. Yeah, we want to get out of here. We want to diminish the effect of this House. We just don't want to hear anymore.

Gez whiz, there are some fundamentals about democracy, and you're going to have to put up with it, I'm afraid. One of the rights is: gez whiz, the opposition gets a chance to speak. Funny as it seems, gez whiz, every member of the House has an opportunity to speak. But if you sit and be quiet, how can you go home and tell your people, "I went to represent you, and I said nothing – said nothing – I didn't talk about it at all"? I mean, the arrogance shown in this House and the disrespect for the House – they speak more times out of turn than they ever do standing on their feet. Standing on their feet: what is it? It's going to get coffee and coming back. Reading books. Some great books, Lorne. Jeez, the guy's got a good selection of books; it's just wonderful.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View on a point of order.

#### **Point of Order Reflections on Members**

MS HALEY: Just rising on a point of order, Mr. Speaker, on *Beauchesne* 486: casting "injurious reflections uttered in debate." I frankly find the last three speakers' comments absolutely insulting. I take my job very seriously. I really don't need these snide comments from over here. I don't golf; that's one of them. You know, I do rise. When I have something to say, I say it. I want them to retract these statements.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Speaking on the point of order – and I'll have to allow my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona to speak to his point on it – quite frankly, I can't see a point of order here. This is a House for some free speech. I'm not talking about any individual. I'm talking about the opportunity to do the business of the province of Alberta, some debates, some actual debate, some items that have some significance. If it happens that members opposite don't enter debate, jeez, I can hardly be held responsible for that, sir.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First of all, on the point of order as raised by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, I think we can only deal with one, although your comments may brush others. The Chair at the same moment that the hon. member rose was concerned about relevance. If we are on the issue of Motion 22, some of the comments have been just rather broad-brushed, and we would hope that we could return to this without really getting into whether people – not you, hon. member – golf or whether they want to go home or whether they don't want to

come or whatever. Why don't we deal with the issue? If you would do that, Edmonton-Calder, we'd be pleased to hear your comments.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the ruling. I'd be mindful of the previous ruling of the Speaker about the matter of, oh, 25 minutes or 30 minutes ago and try to stick to the point.

### Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Speaking to the matter at hand – and this is a matter of import. Mr. Speaker, I have difficulty keeping my remarks to a minimum. This is something that strikes at what we, the opposition, do. We're called upon by the public, those that elected us, to question the government on every move. I mean, that's how the system works, in case some people missed the point. To cut that off, to limit that, to stop that, which is the effect of this, allows the latitude that it's – I can't think of another motion in this House that would allow the latitude that this motion has.

Now, if some people feel insulted, well, gee, I'm sorry. I wasn't speaking to them individually. I'm sure a number of members work very hard at what they do here. I would just say that perhaps it's a little obvious to all of those around the province to say that you should be doing some of your work in public. Some of it should be debate. Some of it should be in deciding those fundamental issues that affect all of us. How much tax? We have one Bill in this package that we've dealt with in this session, the No Tax Increase Act. Well, there's a number of ways around that, as you've heard in debate, but debate from where? From only one side of the House. I don't hear any debate coming, saying: "No, you're wrong. This is the reason for this part of a Bill or an Act." No, we don't hear about it at all. I say that this government, like no other that I know of, has taken every single opportunity to get out from underneath the dome.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yeah. [some applause]

MR. WHITE: Yeah. See? There we go. Thank you very kindly. *Hansard* will note that there was a large pounding of desks in there. Yes, there are people that want to get out of here. Sure, they're quite happy to get out of here, because this is where they get questioned. This is the place that they're put to the test. This is the place that the mettle of the ministers is tested. This is the place where you hear it continually: question, question, question. Well, then the effect of that is to say to limit debate. Don't bother us with the facts. Don't bother us and tell us anything. We just want to get out of here, just want to go home, because we have in our arrogance decided exactly how things will be done, and any question of that is actually an error. Everybody knows that. How could a government possibly be in error? Well, it's called democracy, folks, and, you know, for thousands of years it actually worked.

We have a history in this Legislature of some 20 times that this government has invoked closure to get out. I mean, if you did actually enter debate, we'd have a much more difficult time saying that there's some reason to continue debate. If we actually heard some, you know, if you actually said – oh, I take that back. Gee, I was here last night, and, yes, there was a member – actually two members, a minister and another member – that actually did enter debate and actually did agree with some of that which was being said from this side and disagreed with other parts of it. It was refreshing. Quite frankly, I don't remember hearing that before.

I know some members of this House actually have had some experience at the municipal level. If you want to hear some debate, go listen to it. It's out there in public. They just say it as it is. Sometimes it's right; sometimes it's wrong. But they talk it out and, lo and behold, you know what? Some of those politicians can actually change their minds on something, in public. Oh, that's unbelievable. That could not happen here.

We've seen the spectacle of people running out of the House saying: look, here's an amendment, because this is what's going to happen to the Bill. No, no, no. It doesn't happen at all. Here we have the spectacle of a government saying: no, not a chance, not a hope of ever having a fall session. No; we just can govern by government decree. [interjection] Oh, that's right; okay. Listen; I have a member opposite who's indicating that somehow I've flip-flopped on a number of things. Yeah, I've changed my mind on some things, oh sure, and will do it again.

As a matter of fact, some of the Bills, unbeknownst to you – if you'd happened to be listening some of those times, you'd understand that I actually agree with a great number of the Bills that are here and therefore enter in debate in a limited fashion, because I have to convince my colleagues on this side of the House that it's a good Bill and we don't want to waste any time at it, so I don't say anything about it. But do you hear any of it? No. Not a hope, because, you know, that would be too much like legislating. That would be too much like doing what the average soul out there thinks we do in here. They think we actually debate some things and decide collectively how to do things. Many of them actually think that I'm part of the government. I have to explain to them that I get to point out errors and that's about it. Hopefully, the press gallery and others will understand the issues as raised, and they will bring them to attention.

### 5:10

I get cards and letters all the time on points of business and do bring them up in the House at times. You know what? It does make a difference. This is a democracy like no other. We have a province that is second to none in the world: I mean, the resources we have here, the people we have here, and the freedoms we have here, save one. Not a lot of freedom in getting your voice heard as a politician unless you're at another level of government, because it certainly doesn't happen here. Here you have a new member of the House from Edmonton-Strathcona who spent a great deal of time educating people in this province – I don't remember how many years it is – who comes to a House where he thinks he going to have some impact. Yes, he's going to be one member, but he's going to raise his voice. Do you know what happens? He gets hooted and hollered down. Gee whiz. Talk about arrogance and bully tactics. It's unbelievable.

If any member of the other side had one day to walk in the shoes of this side of the House and to understand what is happening, it would do you good. There is a time when walking in another man's shoes would stand this government in good stead. Likewise, I have to admit that having one day on that side of the House to realize what the difficulties of that side of the House are would help me also, but that's not likely to occur in the short term and certainly not until the next election, when things could change in a marked way.

Mr. Speaker, there's no use going through the highlights of this session because there are none. I mean, look. The highlight is a freedom of information Bill that actually limits debate, where closure was invoked? In most Houses and certainly in the original House of Commons that would be reason for jokes forever. Freedom of information and then limit debate on it? I mean, there's something wrong with this picture.

If that's one of the highlights, then maybe one of the lowlights is the omnibus Bill. Here we jam a bunch of stuff in a Bill, and if you continue to head that way – well, hey, why don't we just have two Bills? We have a Speech from the Throne, debate it for a while, and then put closure on that because, gee whiz, that would be talking too much. Then we introduce a budget. Oh yes, we'd have to talk about that, and we've limited that from the days when it used to be hotly debated and there was actually a great deal of information in a budget document. Now you can't tell what the heck is going on. The volume of books that the Treasury used in Mr. Hyndman's day used to be that much. You used to be able to find out from a municipal level, where I was at one time, exactly where the money was going to be expended in the areas of interest. You could find it, and you could actually go to a minister and say: "Why is this here? Why is that there?" They would have no difficulty explaining to you. Now that's not the case.

Now we have this limited debate on a budget, and then you have two Bills: one budget appropriation Bill and one Bill for all others. Invoke closure three times, and, hey, you could probably get out of here in about 25 days, 30 days maximum you'd ever have to spend. Now, is that too much for democracy. That side would say: "That's way too much. We don't want to expend that much time." That would be like being embarrassed by some questions of fact in this House. There are a couple of things that should embarrass this government, and this one should be it. We try to limit debate on a number of subjects, particularly the ones that I've outlined.

The classic one – I've mentioned it earlier and I'll mention it here – is Bill 26. Now, there's another highlight. Here we are working at passing this flimsy little two-page Bill that basically says: oh, we won't add any tax until we talk to each other. [interjections] I mean, this is really ridiculous. Here's a Bill to tell future legislators that . . . [interjections] I'm having a little trouble hearing myself, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] I've seen some pretty unfriendly things, but when a member of a caucus of one today leaves the House and there are catcalls and all kinds of other nasty gestures and laughing, it simply says a lot about the subject matter of most of us that are debating today. A fundamental right to speak, to be heard: regardless of from where you come and regardless of what you have to say, it should be listened to. I mean, it's really a sad comment on how this House acts and reacts.

I've gone through the highlights. If anybody can provide me with another highlight, I'd certainly like to listen to the highlights of this Legislature. There is no plan. This is government without any plan. It's low on plan, high on arrogance, and it's just marching on to Pretoria like there's some plan in place. Well, if there is, where's the plan? Just lay it out in a paragraph. Is it to assist Albertans in getting work? I don't see it. Is it to further the availability of health care to those that are having a tough time here? I don't see it. Is it to assist some of the less fortunate? No. I don't see it. Is it, perhaps, to get some more business happening? Well, if that's the point, hey, let's hear it. I certainly haven't heard it. Some ministers to their credit are doing all they can in their portfolio to advance the cause of . . . [interjection] Energy, for one. Thank you. I'm sure there's a lot of others that are doing things like that. If that's the plan and that's the only plan, well, let's hear it. I don't hear it.

Here we have the spectacle of waiting. We're closing down this House, and we supposedly won't have a session in the fall because, "Oh, we're having an economic summit." We're putting

it to a Liberal to decide what this government's plan is? Hey, I'm sorry. Something doesn't ring true here, and I'm having a little difficulty understanding what the real plan is if it's not that. Now, if you do have a plan, throw it out and we'll debate the issue. Maybe you're right; maybe we're wrong. I don't know. But the thing is that we'll never know and the citizens of Alberta are certainly not served well by invoking closure over and over and over again and limiting debate in this House on any number of issues.

Mr. Speaker, I've said all I can say for the moment.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against Motion 22. I don't think we should be adjourning this sitting, my very first. You know, when I first came here, the former Speaker gave us some very wise words of encouragement. Also, he was saying to all of us that we need to take this job seriously, we need to take our representation of people seriously, we need to value what we do in this House on behalf of the people of Alberta. Those were good words to start off with, and I've tried to remember them and remind myself of them as I've sat in this House for some eight weeks now.

I believe there's much work to be done. I notice that today there were 13 new Bills introduced. Is that not work that is to be done by this Legislature? I'm sure that everyone that put forward those Bills has every intention of going through them, and I think it's important that we do go through them. Surely no one would tell me that those had been put forward frivolously. I know I did not put mine forward that way.

Does this government not value this Legislature and what we do in it? It's part of our job as elected members to be in this House debating legislation, developing the structure and the underpinnings for a good life in the province of Alberta. As a new MLA I am truly shocked and dismayed at the impatience that I sense from the other side. I notice that in a number of ways. The number of times that the question is called before a debate has even begun on a Bill: how is this contributing to a good legislative experience and to an open and public debate on a Bill when people are calling for the question constantly, before there's been any reasonable discussion on it?

5:20

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

MS BLAKEMAN: Why, thank you for the example.

Why would we be calling closure on a Bill? You know, I've heard a rumour that some people feel that the opposition could be filibustering, but then on the other hand we're given some sort of statistics showing that we haven't debated on Bills enough. That strikes me as a contradiction and an enormous one.

I agree with my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood about facing chastisement from members for speaking out, for getting up and doing what people elected me to come here and do. I believe that a good number of the members in this Assembly speak carefully. They do their work, and they wish to be bringing forward those voices that they represent. They're not wasting time; they're not drawing anything out. Why would you? That serves no good purpose. We are elected for the business in this Legislature, for developing legislation.

Someone else has spoken on the cynicism of the electors, and I think it's the behaviour or the suggestions that have happened

here that create that cynicism. It behooves all of us as good legislators to conduct ourselves in a manner to counteract that poor opinion that many of the people in Alberta are coming to have of us. That includes some of the things I've already pointed out. This Assembly offers the process and the structure for us to consult the electors, consult our constituents and bring those issues forward here so that we can develop legislation for them.

There is much work to be done. Today I put forward for first reading Bill 218, the Domestic Abuse Act. Parts of that Bill have been worked on in this Chamber before. It appeared to be an idea that was valued. There's much work to be done there. I have to ask myself and other members in the Assembly the question: are we willing to take the responsibility for the women who will be injured or battered or maybe at worst case – please, I hope this doesn't happen – killed in the interim if we're not able to debate this Bill and provide them with the structure that they need to be able to counteract some of this? The ability to stay in session now and debate some of these Bills or to call a fall session is in your hands, but I truly do not want to see that Bill wait for another year. What kind of damage can be done in that year while we wait for that?

We have health reform that we still need to be working on. We have education that we still to be working on. What about the debate over the Growth Summit? That seems to be setting an agenda here, but who is attending and how well is it represented? There's a great deal of debate to happen over that. Debate on environmental protection. How about gambling and VLTs or freedom of information? There's a lot of work to be done here.

The other thing that's concerned me as a new MLA is the erosion of democracy, and adjourning this session at this point fits under that label for me. I'm really concerned at the amount of business that goes on behind closed doors, away from the scrutiny of the public. We have, I believe, seven standing committees that operate somewhere behind a large closed door, and those are formulating policy that the public doesn't know about. We have legislative committees that are never called. We have members defeating amendments that would include referrals to the Law and Regulations Committee, and these are integral parts of the legislation that's being brought forward. These regulations are the implementation of this legislation and should be scrutinized by this Chamber. I really see this as an erosion of democracy.

I was very disturbed to see the way the budget debates were set up and were limited. I mean, that was carefully thought out and set out in the Legislative Assembly Act or whichever Act it falls under, the amount of debate that we would put in, the amount of careful thought we would put in both to presenting the budgets and to debating the budgets. To have this new system or structure where debate, I feel, was severely limited also made it very difficult for critics of portfolios to be in more than one place at

once. How is that serving the people of Alberta, and how are the hon. members on the other side contributing to that process? I would think you would honour what we have to say as much as we honour what you have to say.

I'm really concerned at the introduction of omnibus Bills in this Chamber. This is not a useful debate. It certainly causes suspicion in the public, and I'm disappointed in the government for doing that. In my mind it's always associated with an American style of politics, which is not one that I admire, and I truly would not like to think that of the members on the other side of the House, but I suppose that given the move towards a U.S. health care system, perhaps that is the way they are going. I hope not, for Albertans' sakes.

I'm concerned about the consultation that is put forward and not listened to. I'm concerned about limiting debate, about closure. All of these things are contributing to an erosion of democracy and of free speech in this House. I'm concerned about policy being developed behind closed doors, by things like writing into legislation that a minister can override legislation. It is astounding to think that that could happen. We're creating gods by doing that sort of thing, and we will live to regret it, I'm sure. Now we have the threat of no fall session, and that is absolutely unforgivable. Unless we're going to stay in this House and complete the business, all the business that needs to be done on behalf of this province, then there should be a fall sitting called.

I will slightly amend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's challenge. I would be willing to support this motion for adjournment if there is a promise today for a four-week fall session, but without that four-week fall session and a guarantee of it today, I cannot support Motion 22 to adjourn.

Thank you very much.

MR. HAVELOCK: In light of the hour, Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn and reconvene in Committee of the Whole at 8 p.m.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that the Assembly do now adjourn and that when we meet again we do so at 8 p.m. in Committee of the Whole. All those in favour of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]

