

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, June 11, 1997 **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 97/06/11
 [The Speaker in the Chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. The prayer used today comes to us from the office of the mayor of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Let us pray.

O Lord, we thank You for the rich resources of our community, our province, and our country.

Grant us wisdom in our deliberations and divine guidance in all our considerations.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on June 4 now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that all residents requiring long term care are able to access this service in an equitable manner within the publicly funded system.

head: Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 30 Health Information Protection Act

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 30, the Health Information Protection Act.

This Act seeks to establish strong and effective ways of protecting the privacy of Albertans' personal health information, providing Albertans with access to their health information, and setting out rules for collecting, using, and disclosing health information.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 30 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 30 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In preparation for the debate on Bill 30, the health information Bill, I'm tabling copies of the OECD guidelines on the protection of privacy and trans-

border flow of personal data adopted September 23, 1980, and by Canada in July 1984, also an analysis by Shirish Chotalia, an Edmonton lawyer, of the OECD guidelines and what's required in Alberta to be compliant.

Thank you.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today four copies of the unanswered question from the designated supply subcommittee.

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

MS HALEY: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I'd like to table 90 copies of a package of letters sent to me by a grade 6 class from Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills and ask that they be distributed to all members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Council on Professions and Occupations I'm pleased to table the 1996-97 annual report of the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association and the 1997 annual report of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, Where Visions Meet.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of two constituents in my riding, Edmonton-Castle Downs, I have two letters here with respect to Bill 209, urging me not to support the Bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of our answers to the Committee of Supply questions that were forwarded on April 29 of this year.

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 I have from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar Allen and Marilyn Verbeek. This letter is in support of Bill 209.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. One is a letter from the staff at Kenilworth school strongly opposed to Bill 209. One is a petition urging the government staff to increase funding to private schools. One is a letter from David Lygo, who also supports funding to private schools. One is a petition signed by 132 parents urging the government not to increase funding to private schools.

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure today in tabling for the House four copies of a document which I referred to yesterday in question period. The document is information bulletin No. 46, entitled *The Alberta and Western Canadian Export Experience: 1988-96*, authored by Stephen Janzen and Edward Chambers out of the Western Centre for Economic Research in the Faculty of Business at the University of Alberta.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling copies of letters that I have received from constituents who are very concerned with Bill 209.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of excerpts from a government of Alberta document entitled *Alberta Careers Beyond 2000*. This is copyrighted by Advanced Education and Career Development.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special guest who is here from Ukraine. His name is Mychailo Sydiak. He is a representative of the Ukraine credit union development assistance program, which is a special joint project of the Canadian Co-operative Association and the Council of Ukrainian Credit Unions of Canada. He represents all of southern Ukraine in this matter as they move toward learning more about the banking and credit system. He's here as a special guest of Mr. Peter Dackiw, chairman of the Council of Ukrainian Credit Unions, and he's accompanied here by Wally Tkach, another prominent businessperson and also a member of the council, of which I'm happy to say I'm also a member. It's a pleasure to join the members of the Assembly in welcoming them here today. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome. Vitayemo.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to the members of the Legislature some home schoolers from the constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne from the community of Wildwood. There are 20 students here, grades 4 to 9, accompanied by five adults and group leaders: Mrs. Dawn Cacka, Mrs. Jacquie Seib, Kay Johnsen, Sandra McKee, and Rose Chalifoux. They're seated in the members' gallery, I believe. I'd ask them to rise and be welcomed by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly here today three gentlemen who have a very vested interest in the cattle industry in this province. They're here to meet with different government officials and different members that they've known for a long time. They are in the members' gallery: Larry Helland, chairman of the Alberta Cattle Commission; Arno Doerksen, who is the government liaison; and the general manager, Gary Sargent. I would ask these gentlemen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three people from the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta: Mr. Gary Duthler, Mrs. Sara Leenheer, and Mr. Ary De Moor. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly a pleasure today to be able to introduce two people from the Calgary-North Hill area to you and through you to members of this Legislature. The first person is a lady named Cathy Caldwell. She's been with me for nine years and frankly probably deserves a medal for staying that long.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed. Agreed.

1:40

MR. MAGNUS: I expected that from the opposition, not from my own side, Mr. Speaker.

The second person is a lady that's been my constituency president multiple times and has been a longtime supporter. Her name is Thelma Crowther. They're kind of the Thelma and Louise of the Calgary constituency people. If they could stand and receive the warm traditional welcome from this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 21 students from the BCN community school. They are accompanied by their teacher Christine Gullion, teacher assistant Freida Gullion, and bus driver Gordon Cardinal. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly today two very special guests of mine who are seated in the members' gallery. They are both working with me at my constituency office in Calgary-North West. They are here to observe the proceedings of this great Assembly. First, I'd ask them to rise. They are Meg Jones, my assistant, and Jamal Worobec. He's a third-year political science student at the University of Calgary. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two visitors from St. Paul. I'll start with my constituency manager, Mrs. Therese Cloutier. Therese is very efficient, and she is always looking for new challenges and changes. In the last four years she worked for three different MLAs: she started working for a Liberal MLA, she worked for an independent MLA, and the last assignment is for a government MLA. She is

accompanied today by a summer student, Lisa Fontaine. So I'd like to ask both Lisa and Therese to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**
Private Health Services

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, in the context of the HRG debate, the president of the Alberta Medical Association, Dr. Kabir Jivraj, makes the point, and I quote: if we have a well-funded public system, there should not be a need for private hospitals. Dr. Tom Noseworthy, chair of the University of Alberta's public health sciences department and a past member of the National Forum on Health, has said that private patients could make the HRG concept work but that would mean compromising a key principle of medicare. To the Minister of Health: who exactly is the minister listening to on private health care and private hospitals when prominent health care professionals like Jivraj and Noseworthy are telling him that HRG won't work and will undermine the medicare system? Is he just listening to those people who want to make money on health care in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, above all, of course, we as a government are listening to those people in Alberta who want a top-quality health care system, one which we have made a priority in our budget both in terms of our initial restructuring and in terms of our reinvestment initiatives as a government. We are committed to having a good public health care system in this province which adheres to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, unlike perhaps the Liberal federal government we have not made the significant cuts in transfer payments, which go far beyond the percentage as far as Alberta is concerned. Therefore, I think that the Alberta government stands out as a leader in terms of having a public health care system which is well funded.

MR. MITCHELL: It's just a technique, Mr. Speaker. They didn't really cut; it was all the feds. They didn't cut \$500 million. They didn't shut down hospitals that people need. The minister stands here and tries to convince us of something that is absolutely untrue.

Speaker's Ruling
Preambles to Supplementary Questions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, please sit down. Hon. Government House Leader, please sit down as well.

Yesterday there was a point of order raised with respect to preambles and the use of preambles in this Assembly. *Beauchesne* is very clear on the use of preambles. There's also been an agreement between the governing party and the two opposition parties about the use of preambles in this Assembly. Yesterday there was a real point of order with respect to the use of preambles in this Assembly. So, hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, will you please adhere to the practices that we have all agreed to and you've all asked the Speaker to enforce. Please.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try not to inflame debate.

Private Health Services
(continued)

MR. MITCHELL: Does the minister not understand that when he underfunds the public system, he creates a false demand for a private system which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy to get his agenda for private health where he wants to get it to go?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the premise of the member's question, in that we have, as I've said, made our health care system in this province a priority in government expenditure, a priority in reinvestment. We are wanting an effective and efficient health care system in this province.

With respect to the remarks of Dr. Noseworthy and particularly Dr. Jivraj, I certainly look forward to working with the Alberta Medical Association to make sure that our system is affordable and sustainable in the future and remains the good public health care system that it is.

MR. MITCHELL: In the face of all the input from health care professionals, Jivraj, Noseworthy, so many other people across this province who know something about the public health care system, why won't this minister simply say no to more private health care before it's too late to reverse the consequences for the public health care system in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the implication of the question is that something has changed. We are still maintaining our public health care system. In this House I have very clearly outlined the monitoring process that is in place with respect to developments that may or may not occur with respect to HRG. One example is the letter sent to all regional health authorities requiring them to review through Alberta Health and get approval for any contractual relationships that might be – might be – contemplated there. We are monitoring the whole situation to make sure it is in compliance with the Canada Health Act. To this point in time there have been no decisions or developments to the contrary, and we certainly do not anticipate any that would in any way jeopardize the public health care system in this province.

Peace River Flood

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, this government has failed the people of Peace River. Many downtown businesses were devastated by the flood on April 19. The viability of downtown Peace River is in jeopardy. It's affecting the entire area. People's livelihoods literally hang in the balance. The minister of transportation says that it's the federal government's fault, but he denies that the federal program makes it very, very clear that provinces can do more, and in fact Manitoba has. To the minister of transportation, responsible for public safety: why hasn't the minister acted within his own ability, within his own government, within his own department's authority to help the victims of the Peace River flood? How long do they have to wait?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you. Certainly this is a very timely question and one that we keep asking their federal cousins as well. The program basically has three particular parts to it. One is an agricultural component, and that is that if you make more money away from the farm than you do on the farm, you're totally ineligible.

MRS. SOETAERT: Where's your responsibility?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I'll answer the question. If you want to ask the question, you ask the question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, why don't you address your comments via the Chair.

Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, I know that you are on the list of anticipated questions this afternoon. If you ask all your questions now, we'll never get to you later.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

1:50

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second component is a small business component, and that is that if you are in partnership, you are ineligible. You have to be in total control, and you have to be the manager of the program. The third component is a cap of a hundred thousand dollars.

The three areas that we have approached the federal government on are, one, working with the cap, two, the small business component, and three, the agricultural component. We have a letter from the federal government denying that indeed they will make any changes to that formula. With that in mind we then approached the federal government to do exactly what they offered Manitoba, in that indeed through the WDO, the diversification fund, a program, 50-50, matched 50 percent by the federal government, 50 percent by the provincial government, would be instituted to be allowed where the eligibility of the other program did not fit. We have asked the federal government to allow us to participate in that program. We have written to the federal government, we have phoned the federal government, we have talked to the federal minister on this particular issue, and there has been no response. The federal government had indicated that by Friday they would have a response. Then they indicated this past Monday that there would be a response. To date we have heard nothing from the federal government.

MR. MITCHELL: Why, Mr. Speaker, when this government doesn't want the federal government involved in health care, doesn't want the federal government involved in education, doesn't want it involved in the Wheat Board, does he keep referring to a federal program when he himself can put money and resources into Peace River and help those businesses get back and get viable and save the economy of Peace River? Why do you keep blaming the federal government? Take some leadership.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, this is a federal/provincial program. The provincial government is responsible for the first dollar per capita of this program, and the provincial government pays up front. For the next \$2 per capita the cost is matched 50-50 by the provincial and federal governments. For the next \$2 the federal government puts in 75 cents, the provincial government puts in 25 cents, and for anything above that, the federal government puts in 90 cents and the provincial government puts in 10 cents. To date the provincial government has paid out 68 claims in full that were eligible for a total of \$1,782,567. To date the federal government has paid zero.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, does the minister of transportation actually believe that some businessperson in downtown Peace River cares whether the program is federal or cares whether the program is provincial rather than caring that they have a minister that should be representing their interests at the provincial level to this provincial government?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, this provincial government doesn't believe that Albertans should be second-class citizens, and we believe in that very strongly. The federal government announced their program in Manitoba some time ago, even though the flood in Manitoba was much later than Alberta's. The federal government announced a program for Quebec immediately after the disaster that was there. For Peace River citizens there is no reason whatsoever that we should allow the federal Liberal cousins to be able to move away from participating in this program. It's not fair. It's not right. Albertans are not second-class citizens.

THE SPEAKER: Third opposition main question, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of transportation knows that he has the power to provide more generous assistance under the federal plan. Now, the minister went to Peace River and said: the program pays 100 percent of eligible losses. And that's a quote. He neglected to say that the program is very specific, and some people who have put their entire life savings into a business are not getting a dime. It's a catch-22: you don't get the money unless you reopen, but the relief isn't enough to reopen. These people have mortgages already, and they are victims. My questions are to the minister of transportation. Why did you lead the people of Peace River into thinking that they would be fully compensated after the flood? Why didn't you tell them the whole story?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's important to understand that the people in Peace River were advised of the whole story. We did advise that this is a federal/provincial program. We did advise of the criteria of the program, and indeed we advised the people of Peace River that we would work on their behalf with our utmost power. We have done that, and we will continue to do that. It is unfortunate, however, that our Liberal cousins don't work in support of this particular need, because indeed the people of Peace River are hurting, and it's very, very difficult.

Just going back to the program, Alberta has a hundred thousand dollar cap. It is the largest cap in Canada. Manitoba has just changed their cap from \$35,000 to a hundred thousand dollars, but they have a 20 percent deductible. British Columbia has a hundred thousand dollar cap as well, but they have a \$10,000 administration fee. Alberta has the largest cap in all of Canada as far as disaster services programming is concerned.

MRS. SOETAERT: Your speech is on the tape in case you can't remember quite what you said.

My first supplemental: will the government now pay to raise the Heart bridge, as helping with an engineering study is not enough? I mean, look at what your shortsightedness has cost the people of Peace River.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the local bridges are the responsibility of the local municipalities. Certainly if there is a need – and there has never been a call to the province to assist in raising the Heart River bridge. In 1992 there was a study done to see how the hospital in Peace River could be accessed in case of a flood. That study was completed, and indeed there was no request given to raising the Heart River bridge at that time. The question that was asked was: in case of a flood, how can the Peace River hospital be accessed? Now, there is going to be a

new hospital built in Peace River, and it is my understanding that it will not be built in the same location. Therefore, the need and the urgency for that bridge being raised of course will have to be considered. The province has written to the town of Peace River and has indicated to the town that they would be more than willing to be involved in cost sharing the study. Now, it is my understanding that the study will be undertaken. The town has agreed to that, and that's what we are in the process of doing.

MRS. SOETAERT: Three feet lower than the dike.

My final question is to the minister of transportation. I'd like to know why you just don't care about the people up north. This is a tremendous blow to the whole town. They are victims, and they need relief. Why have you turned your back on them? That's what you've done.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's very unfortunate, because we do care. As a matter of fact, we have sent \$1,782,000-plus to the town of Peace River. Within two months we have done that. We have asked the federal government to participate in the additional programming, which they have done in Manitoba, which they have done in Quebec, but they refuse to participate in Peace River. The question has to be asked: why? Why are Peace River citizens second-class citizens as far as the federal government is concerned?

MRS. SOETAERT: You only went last week for help. Why didn't you ask before last week, Walter?

Oh. I'm upset. Sorry.

THE SPEAKER: Did the hon. member say she was upset?

MRS. SOETAERT: At his answer, yes.

THE SPEAKER: Why doesn't the hon. member just go and have a cup of coffee and settle down?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

2:00 Health Resource Group Inc.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting with Dr. John Cowell and Ms Betty Screpnek, CEO and chair respectively of the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board. Dr. Cowell told me that the reason the WCB is contemplating using the HRG for-profit hospital in Calgary is that waiting lists for orthopedic surgery are up to six months long. The WCB appears to want to queue-jump its clients over the six-month waiting lists in the public system by using the surgical and patient care facilities of the HRG for-profit hospital. My question is to the Minister of Health. Why is the minister creating market opportunities for American style, for-profit hospitals by underfunding the public health care system to such an extent that there are six-month waiting lists for orthopedic surgery?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I have made my statements previously today about the priority that we have placed on funding for the health care system in this province. Also I would like to add to that and specifically refer to the very significant increase in funding, some 40 million dollars late last year to Edmonton and Calgary for provincewide services. We have certainly placed a great priority on that particular area.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, that I think has to be kept in

mind here is that when we look at the statistics over the last many months but particularly recently with the increased funding, we have been providing in this province greatly increased service in these particular areas of treatment over what was the case before. Yes, the demand is certainly increasing.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the management of waiting lists, the specialists that are involved in this particular procedure assure me that they do manage lists in an ethical manner according to their assessments of need, and they set their priority list accordingly, whatever the particular patient's background might be.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, given this new information that the WCB is looking at contracting HRG for orthopedic surgery, why isn't the minister concerned about Dr. Stephen Miller's apparent conflict of interest as both the chief medical officer of HRG and the chief of orthopedic surgery at the Foothills hospital when his role there includes a gatekeeping function regarding waiting lists?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, to a degree this is a hypothetical circumstance in terms of this particular service. I would like to reiterate that in terms of the work that Dr. Miller is currently doing as a physician working for and through a health authority in this province, he, like all other physicians working in this particular area or in the system totally, is responsible for assessing the relative need and priority of patients needing particular procedures and to proceed according to the priority list that is established in an ethical manner.

DR. PANNU: There's nothing hypothetical, Mr. Speaker, about the relation of Dr. Miller to HRG.

Given that the Minister of Health is the chief guardian of the public health care system, why is he failing to take decisive action to eliminate long waiting periods for medically needed and urgent services and thereby to remove once and for all the reason for private, for-profit hospitals to exist in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we have taken decisive action in terms of addressing waiting lists and the increasing demand in our society for a number of highly specialized procedures. It is perhaps repeating my previous remarks, but in the November 24 Action on Health announcement we placed a very major priority on provincial procedures which involve heart bypass surgery, which involve various types of orthopedic procedures. The performance of the system has been such that the number of operations being done in this province is significantly higher than it was before. We have acted in a decisive way in that particular area.

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

Ernest Manning High School

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ernest Manning high school is in my constituency of Calgary-West. It is special for many reasons, and one is that it has successfully housed for 16 years the program for parenting adolescents and also the Ernest Manning high school infant centre. Students enrolled in this program are from the Calgary area at large. The nursery is certified for a capacity of 35 infants and toddlers. I feel the full program more than meets this government's hands-up, proactive approach to a specific segment of our disadvantaged youth. With

present Calgary board of education funding to be discontinued for this program as of August 31, '97, I am very concerned for its future existence. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Can this valuable program be saved?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm of the same observation as the hon. member who asked the question, that this is a valuable program. The Calgary board of education does have the authority to allocate budget dollars to the programs that it feels are a priority for its school district, and it is not my responsibility to interfere with the jurisdiction that that board has in that regard.

That being said, I do believe that the program is a valuable one, and I think that there are other options that the board may want to consider in trying to keep this program for teen parents going. One option that I'm aware of is the example of the Terra school here in the city of Edmonton. This program for teen parents is a co-operative arrangement between the school boards of both the Edmonton public and separate boards. Funding is shared and the school is staffed by both public and separate school teachers. So I do encourage the Calgary board of education to look at those types of alternatives such as the co-operative, shared model here in the city of Edmonton to keep the program going at Ernest Manning.

MS KRYCZKA: Considering the program's present multidisciplinary approach – i.e., key resource players being Catholic Family Service, Calgary Health Services, and Ernest Manning high school administration – my second question is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Can a community/government partnership be created?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say from the outset that I think it's extremely important that teen parents go back to school. I think that that is probably the single most important issue here. What we must understand is that if the children of the children do not have day care, these children will not be going back to school. I think it's imperative that they do, and I think it's imperative that we find a way to ensure that the children of the children still have a day care to go to while they go to school.

Presently there are six licensed day cares within a 15-block radius of the school. I'll give the hon. member my assurance that we will work and do everything, the utmost possible to ensure that these children have a space for their children to go into day care so they can attend school, so they can go out.

Thank you.

MS KRYCZKA: My third question is to the minister responsible for children's services. Does this program model fit within the parameters of early intervention programs?

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I do believe, if we're looking at the program, that it possibly could fit within what we consider the early intervention program. But when we're talking about early intervention, there are certain criteria that were used. We were talking about community based, and I do believe it has the community-based criteria. Secondly, we looked at early intervention, and this certainly is an early intervention program that could be considered. Thirdly, we were also looking at what we call integration, and I could see the integration model in that perspective. Fourth, for the four pillars, was the aboriginal component, and I'm not exactly sure whether or not all the

criteria would be met under this specific program.

However, I think it's an opportune time for the adolescent program to come forward, because Rocky View has submitted its service plan, at least in a draft form, and I do believe it could be well worth our while to investigate what possibilities could occur there. As a matter of fact, I would encourage our regional director – in fact I'll tell him – to make sure that he works with this program to see how we can make it so that it can go further.

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

2:10 Health Information Legislation

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 21 of this year the Health minister admitted that his department had either signed or was about to sign a contract with a private corporation to develop the first stage of their health information system, and now with the introduction of Bill 30 this afternoon, we can see that this government knows exactly where it is going, with or without any legislative approval. That place is one where protecting patient privacy is clearly secondary to administrative convenience. My question is to the Minister of Health this afternoon. The government's own privacy training manual states:

In the past we thought of the information we held as belonging to us, to deal with as we saw fit. Now we must think of this information as belonging to the public.

Why does this minister's Bill 30 material state that Albertans do not and will not own their own personal health information? Why the double standard?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the very key issue and desire of government to protect the privacy of individual health information is a key component of the legislation that the hon. member has just referred to. It is well featured as a major thrust of this particular legislation in the briefing material, in the material that is being sent out not just to the people within the health care system but, as is our priority here, the total public of Alberta. It is very, very misleading to infer that there is not that priority, that clear desire for the proper balance in this legislation or in the accompanying material.

MR. DICKSON: We're talking double standards, Mr. Speaker.

My follow-up question to the same minister would be this: why are private hospitals like HRG in Calgary not going to be covered by Bill 30?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that again the hon. member is, for whatever purposes, jumping to certain conclusions in this Assembly. He is ignoring the whole open aspect of this particular process. He is ignoring the fact that we are making a major, major effort, because we regard this issue as a very, very serious one, to consult and to inform Albertans about the various aspects of using information but above all protecting the privacy of individuals.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm only reading his own Bill 30.

My final question to the minister would be this: why are pharmacists, who play such a key role in our health care system, not covered by Bill 30?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that the answer to the question as far as the hon. member is concerned is that I would

invite him to read the rest of the Bill. Because this is an issue raised in a public venue, the most important one in the province in some ways – and that is the Legislature of Alberta – I would want to assure hon. members present and the public of this province that confidential information with respect to pharmaceuticals and the practice of pharmacy is covered by this legislation.

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

Student Achievement Tests

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The results of the third international mathematics and science study, known as TIMS, were announced earlier this morning. Once again, Alberta students placed with the best in the world, yet many groups continue to report underfunding and overcrowding in our education system. Would the Minister of Education tell this House how Alberta students can rank so highly in the TIMS results if our schools are underfunded, as many groups claim?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that there are some people who portray a very stygian future for education, but as I've said many times before, I strongly believe that education is appropriately funded here in the province of Alberta, and as I've also said many times in this House and in other places, quality of education is not dependent upon how much you spend but where you spend it. In my view the fact that we spend more money on instruction rather than on things like administration is one of the strong reasons why students in Alberta do very well, as demonstrated by the TIMS study.

As the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow indicated, results were released this morning on the TIMS study, and I'm happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that once again Alberta students are among the very best in the world. They have outranked all other English-speaking participants. Not only that, but these grade 4 students achieved the highest scores in all of Canada. Alberta's grade 4 students achieved third in the area of science and seventh in the area of math compared to students in 26 countries around the world and provinces that took part in this study. Our grade 4 science students were third, behind only Korea and Japan. In the area of math they were tied for seventh in the world with Austria. This places Alberta students in the top one-third of participating countries in the world.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental again for the same minister: since some people are concerned that teachers are teaching strictly for this test, will the minister explain to this Assembly how teachers prepare their students for these exams?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the schools that participate in the TIMS study are selected randomly, and strict guidelines are put in place by the organizers of the study to ensure that students tested are representative of each participating jurisdiction and not just the educational elite. Here in the province of Alberta just over 2,000 students participated from 50 schools. Half of those students were from grade 3, and the other half were from grade 4.

Mr. Speaker, students and teachers are not expected to practise for the tests. The tests do include a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and extended response questions. The students are told prior to the examinations that the tests are being written by students in different countries so some of the questions will seem

easy to them and some of them will appear to be hard. Both teachers and parents are expected to encourage the students to do the best that they can.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: although Alberta students outperformed their Canadian counterparts in math, other tests indicate that the math results still need to improve. Will the minister explain to this Assembly what, if anything, is being done to address student achievements in math?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we do have very high standards in all of our academic subjects in this province including in the area of math, and improving student achievement in math is one of the primary goals of my department. Yes, it's true that Alberta students do well internationally in math, but still not enough students meet our Alberta standards yet. That's why this province is a lead province in developing the western protocol on a common curriculum in mathematics. That curriculum will emphasize the development of math literacy and problem-solving skills and provides the link between math skills and real world situations so students will know how their math is used in their daily lives.

Mr. Speaker, this curriculum is being introduced on a gradual basis in our schools. In 1996 it was introduced in the primary area from kindergarten to grade 6. Next year it will be implemented for grades 7 to 9. Senior high implementation of that curriculum will occur starting in 1998.

There is a number of programs that we're doing to improve math scores. We think that that's a very, very important part of the curriculum in this province.

Private Postsecondary Education

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, recently the department of advanced education published a document, excerpts of which I tabled earlier in the House. It's called Alberta Careers Beyond 2000. This is supposed to provide answers to Albertans regarding future trends in Alberta's workplace. My questions firstly are to the minister of advanced education. What initiatives will your government be pursuing that you have not yet told Albertans about that lead this report to conclude, "There will be more private alternates for education and health care, leading to job creation in these areas."?

MR. DUNFORD: One of the things, Mr. Speaker, that our department does, as well as many employers around the province, is keep their eye on the trends and where the job openings are coming from in the future. Many of us are particularly aware that for about the last five, six, perhaps even 10 years there have been huge forecasts for job openings not only in the education and personal development field but also in the areas of personal care, home care, and some individualized health care.

2:20

One of the things that our department and I as a minister have to be aware of is: what is the responsibility of the taxpayer to get involved in these particular areas? I think that our department has been very conscientious in looking at the overall view of Alberta, deciding what public institutions we are going to provide dollars to, and looking after those programs. Obviously in the areas that we cannot expect the taxpayers to fill, then we have to look toward the private vocational schools. I'm pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that we have a very healthy and vibrant private voca-

tional school industry within this province, and I wish to see it continue.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if that minister understands the catch-22 that he just created.

Maybe the Minister of Education could answer: given that the report concludes that "there will be strong growth in private education at all levels," can the Minister of Education tell the Assembly exactly what the extent of his department's privatization plan really is?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think that this question is in anticipation of Bill 209, which is slated for discussion later this afternoon, and accordingly I'll be waiting for the debate on Bill 209.

MR. SAPERS: Of all the dips and dives, Mr. Speaker, that I've ever seen.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go back to the minister of advanced education, who at least tried to answer. Is it the government's policy to continue underfunding public institutions, particularly in health care and education, to guarantee that private education and private health will be growth industries in the province of Alberta?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to be defined as a minister who took the job that he had extremely seriously, and one of those jobs is as a steward of public dollars. We are continually out working with the people of Alberta, trying to determine what the extent is to which taxpayers are required, voluntarily, I might add – we do not have any sort of constitutional requirement in postsecondary. How much should the taxpayers be bucking up for this particular system?

We have a wonderful system here in Alberta. We have wonderful people that are working within the postsecondary institutions. As a matter of fact, we have wonderful people in the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development. I am absolutely sure and I believe that I can commit to all of the Members of this Legislative Assembly that we will continue to work hard to make sure that our system in Alberta remains strong.

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

Economic Outlook

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Provincial Treasurer, and it relates to economic growth here in the province of Alberta. Statistics indicate that housing starts across Canada increased by 5 percent in May. My constituents would be interested in knowing how these numbers break out for the province of Alberta.

MR. DAY: The question is an important one, because many times when the national economic indicators are given, it's Alberta that is significantly figured in those positive indicators, and oftentimes that isn't broken out of the overall equation. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, and tell the hon. member that housing starts are tracked every month, and over the first five months of '97 as opposed to '96, there was an overall increase in housing starts of about 82 percent across the province. It's not just housing. Our exports are up something like 16 percent. As a matter of fact, every major sector of our economy – agriculture, energy, manufactur-

ing, forestry, petrochemicals, tourism – is showing significant growth gains over last year.

We said back in 1993 that this would be the result, that if we got serious about fiscal integrity and got our finances in order, kept our taxes down, we would attract people-friendly investment. Some people are calling this a boom. There's no question that in Alberta it's got the indicators of that, but we've learned from those boom times, Mr. Speaker, and we see broad-based diversification here and long-term sustainable growth going into the next century.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Treasurer again. Is the growth in housing starts isolated to major cities, or are there other areas of the province experiencing growth as well?

MR. DAY: Well, along with cities like Edmonton, experiencing right now its lowest unemployment rate in a considerable amount of time, this – as I said, there's diversification related to this very strong economic growth. I'm being careful not to use the word "boom." It's right across the province. This year over last year, for instance, Fort McMurray, over 500 percent increase in housing starts; Grande Prairie, something like 202 percent increase; Red Deer, of course, which is close to my heart, because of major announcements there due to diversification and value-added manufacturing going on, about 180 percent increase in housing starts. This is right across the province. Across the entire province the people of Alberta are benefiting from the province's fiscal plan.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. With the increase in industrial activity in Alberta, especially as it relates to the construction industry, will the province experience a shortage of skilled construction workers?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're hearing from some industry people that are extremely concerned. I might bring a couple of anecdotal things to the awareness of the Legislative Assembly. We know there's a real need for welders up in the Fort McMurray area, and I've had a couple of electrical contracting firms in my own area of Lethbridge come and talk to me about how they're unable to bid on some contracts because they can't find the number of journeyman electricians that they need. Certainly looking at the labour statistics that came out last week, we do believe that most of the current demand is being met.

I might again just for the information of the members bring a little good news in the fact that apprenticeship registrations have increased 13 percent in the past two years. This is really 13 percent more people going into what is probably the most wonderful apprenticeship system in Canada. We've talked in earlier questions in the last week or so about interprovincial movement of journeymen through the red seal program. Also, of course, I want to make the members aware that we're even working now down further into the high school level with both our Careers: the Next Generation Foundation and the registered apprenticeship training program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Firearms Registry

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 14 I asked the Minister of Justice to indicate how much the government was spending on its court challenge of the national firearms registry. The minister responded that he could not provide the information about this because to do so would negate the claim of solicitor/client privilege. To the Minister of Justice. Now, I'm not a lawyer, but the lawyers I've spoken with indicate that the government is the client. This response doesn't make a lot of sense. Can you please explain to me exactly how telling Albertans how much money the court challenge is costing could negate the claim of solicitor/client privilege?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is not a lawyer, because if she were, she wouldn't ask the question.

The situation is this, Mr. Speaker. Our department acts as legal counsel to the government with respect to matters in which the government is involved. Quite frankly, as legal counsel for government – and government is the client – it does create a solicitor/client privilege situation. What I've indicated in the House previously is that government has indicated that it is not prepared to waive this privilege at this time. We have, however, provided information through public accounts and through the budgets disclosing what is being spent by the government on outside counsel. We also disclosed what is being spent and actually paid to individual firms. However, we will not link fees to specific issues.

MS OLSEN: Second question to the same minister: why won't your client waive the privilege?

2:30

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I mean, we did just answer the question. We have had discussions with the departments, and quite frankly we feel we're disclosing enough information with respect to the fees, with respect to the counsel that's being hired. Really there's no reason to disclose that. There is nothing to hide.

MS OLSEN: My final question is to the same minister. Why isn't your department at least taking part in the federal/provincial meetings which are determining how the registry will be implemented in Alberta in the event that the court challenge fails?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've made our position very clear with respect to the registry. We do not support the licensing or registration of firearms. This is a critical constitutional argument, because we feel, based on the fact – and that is being provided to the court – that the constitutional rights of the province are being infringed. We take the position that because of that, we will not participate in those discussions because we fundamentally feel that they are illegal.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Employment Standards

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The nature of work has changed, and our laws on employment standards have not caught up with this fact. An increasing number of workers, especially women, hold multiple part-time jobs or are self-employed and receive few or no benefits. My questions today are

to the Minister of Labour. What are you going to do to ensure that employers do not use part-time employment and contracting out simply as a way to avoid paying benefits and bypassing employment standards?

MR. SMITH: Actually, Mr. Speaker, that's a pretty good question. It's a good question because it does talk about the fact that the nature of work is changing in Alberta, as it's changing throughout Canada. People are now being paid in different ways. They're being paid on contract. They're being paid for piece-work. They're being paid to telecommute. They're being paid in a whole variety of different ways. There are different compensatory arrangements.

The member is right. The government laws and regulations are always the last thing to catch up to the pace of the private sector, and in fact that's one of the reasons why employment standards are under review this year. We look forward to that review. We look forward to discussion on that issue as well as issues on the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Labour has no stats specific to Alberta, but we can tell you that women occupy 84 percent of all shared jobs. There are a number of different ways of determining how compensatory arrangements are being made. Importantly, there are a number of companies that now pay benefits to part-time workers. So the trend and a trend that particularly catches up at a time when unemployment is so low, as it is in Alberta, leading the nation at 5 percent – in fact these companies must be competitive in their paying arrangements and their compensatory arrangements in order to attract quality employees.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Labour: will you reduce this incentive to create a marginalized workforce by making part-time workers eligible for prorated benefits similar to those that are enjoyed by full-time workers?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member has been engaged in business for himself and in fact has, contrary to political leanings, a pretty good idea of how the private sector works. I think that the individual knows that legislation that imposes benefits, that requires benefits is classified in your financial statement as wage burden. Wage burden is a particular cost to the employer. So in fact when there's only so much money to be given out in terms of salary, for productivity, for productive time, it can be argued that in exchange for an hourly rate, you can have more benefits. But these are matters that are completely up to the private sector, to an employer and an employee in a job-hiring or a work-related function. It's not up to the government.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has now left us. We had notification during question period of two points of order. Government House Leader, I think we may have dealt with . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Okay.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, citations please.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 417, "should not provoke debate." The minister of transportation

indicated that the province is the only person who has paid money out to the people in the floods. What he neglected to say is that every dime that has been paid out qualifies for the federal grant that will be coming back to the province. No money from this government outside of that plan has gone to these people. That's been the concern. I just feel that the minister, by saying that, is leaving out some information, which I don't think is fair certainly to people in this Assembly or the people in Peace River.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, not wanting to carry on with the debate, but I thought I was very clear in pointing out that the first dollar per capita, which is \$2.7 million, was the responsibility of the province, so the first \$2.7 million of this is totally funded by the province. Indeed, I stand by the statement that I made, and I don't believe there's any point of order here whatsoever. It's just an issue of trying to debate an issue that isn't there. It's not true. The province is responsible for the first \$2.7 million, and in this particular case we have paid \$1,782,567, so obviously the province has paid all of it. Consequently there certainly is no point of order here.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I think that the exchange by the last two hon. members clearly indicates that, number one, there is a dispute about facts, and *Beauchesne* makes it very clear that such a matter does not come under the guise of a point of order. Certainly it would appear to the Chair that this was a very interesting and skillful way of extending the debate beyond Oral Question Period, and we will now move forward.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 36.

[Motion carried]

Air- and Water-quality Monitoring

Q36. Ms Carlson moved that the following question be accepted:

How many staff, full-time equivalents, in the Department of Environmental Protection worked respectively on air-quality monitoring and water-quality monitoring on December 31, 1992, and on December 31, 1996?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Environmental Protection I'd like to move an amendment. I believe the amendment has been distributed. The amendment strikes out "on air-quality monitoring and water-quality monitoring on December 31, 1992, and on December 31, 1996" and substitutes "on ambient air and surface and groundwater quality monitoring during the years ended December 31, 1992, and December 31, 1996."

The question will now read:

How many staff, full-time equivalents, in the Department of Environmental Protection worked respectively on ambient air and surface and groundwater quality monitoring during the years ended December 31, 1992, and December 31, 1996?

The rationale for the amendments, Mr. Speaker, is that we have

added the word "ambient" to clarify that it is the monitoring of the natural resource that is required. The term "quality-monitoring" is usually taken to exclude effluent source monitoring or potable drinking water. Further, the amendment clarifies that both surface and groundwater monitoring are included. Also, we have clarified the time period to be the end of the year, as the original wording could have been taken to mean the specific days, December 31, 1992, and December 31, 1996.

I believe these amendments have actually broadened the scope of the question and hopefully will provide better information to the member.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, we're happy to accept the amendment. It does in fact strengthen the question, and I would like to thank the minister's department and staff for doing so.

[Motion as amended carried]

2:40

head: Motions for Returns

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, and 41.

[Motion carried]

Tax Regime Studies

M33. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies prepared by or for the government for the period January 1, 1993, to April 30, 1997, evaluating the impact of moving from a tax on tax regime to a tax on income regime.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, if I could be permitted to just comment briefly on what propels the need for this motion in my view, I would be very pleased to proceed and do so. Thank you.

We have had numerous discussions . . .

THE SPEAKER: I think, hon. member, we should find out what the response is from the other side as to the process that we have. There are choices here. They're an acceptance, an amendment, or a rejection of the motion. So let's see what happens.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, in the ongoing spirit of openness and accountability the government is pleased to accept this question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to close the debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. I was intending to rise to move it and close it all at once, Mr. Speaker, but protocol should be observed, and I thank you for pointing that out.

I was commenting that there have been numerous discussions over the last several years regarding taxes: how they're collected, how they're paid, what they're collected on, what the amounts are, what the ratios are, and how can we somehow streamline and simplify that system for everyday Albertans. Perhaps at a later stage we can also talk about how we might even reduce some of those taxes for everyday Albertans, but today we're dealing with the issue of studies and/or research reports that the government has prepared. I want to thank the Provincial Treasurer for

undertaking this motion and accepting it today. I look forward to receiving it.

We know that Alberta has the lowest taxes payable in Canada at the moment, and I'd like to preserve that, if we can, and ensure that we don't somehow overpenalize Albertans by not so doing. Yesterday and in earlier days in this House, we debated the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, for example, wherein I again pointed out that there were negotiations that took place between the federal government of Canada and of course the province of Alberta surrounding the issue of corporate taxation. In particular, I was still baffled to learn that we have not yet addressed sufficiently nor successfully the whole issue of asking our corporate tax citizens to fill out one tax form as opposed to having to fill out two separate ones. I do believe that it's time we got on with that particular agenda again.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that there were meetings that took place back in 1993 between the province of Alberta and the government of Canada regarding this issue. However, I was saddened to hear that those talks broke off. Therefore, I would urge the current Provincial Treasurer to do what he can to bring those talks back onstream and see if we can't move forward with that issue.

Specific to personal income taxes, I just want to say that we have had this tax on tax regime, well, for as long as I can remember and perhaps even earlier than that. I don't believe that the tax on tax regime offers us as a province and as provincial taxpayers the flexibility inasmuch as a direct tax on income would. Therefore, I would hope that somewhere in the copies of studies prepared, maybe the Treasurer has addressed that particular issue.

The other issue that I'd really appreciate receiving more information on is the so-called flat tax. There's quite a bit of discussion on it. I think there are some pros and some cons that are very obvious there.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: But there must be some things that the government has uncovered in that regard, which I would be very grateful if he were able to elaborate on.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, we'll have his point of order now.

Point of Order Motions for Returns

MR. DAY: Citing the section related to motions for returns. I appreciate these requests. I'll try and fulfill them, but I believe I'm being asked now for other things than were originally requested in Motion for a Return 33. So I wonder if the member could narrow his remarks to that.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, do you want to participate on the point of order?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yeah. Thank you. The Provincial Treasurer is quite right. I did get a bit carried away, but I thought I'd take the opportunity to just ask him if, in the copies that he's preparing, they could include those things. If they don't, Mr. Speaker, then that's fine too. But if they're there, please provide them.

Debate Continued

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'll just close by saying that I would hold the Provincial Treasurer in his discoveries to that OATH that I offered to him the other day. We want government to be open, accountable, transparent, and I'm going to change my H for honesty to helpful, because that's what we're looking for here. So thank you again for undertaking the motion.

[Motion carried]

Point of Order Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: Now the Chair would like to make a comment on the point of order that was raised by the Provincial Treasurer and responded to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. This is really a very interesting process, which we've tried to streamline in recent weeks in terms of comments made.

Here we have this very interesting situation today where the hon. member moves a motion for a return. A response comes from the government saying: we will accept the motion for a return. Then the Chair invites the hon. member to close the debate, and the hon. member proceeds to express himself with respect to a number of matters, which is all within his right, but the Chair would really prefer it if those remarks were restricted to the subject of the motion for a return rather than a greater matter that might be beyond the motion for a return.

Now, it's not an attempt here to control discussion or debate. It's just that the Chair finds it very, very soothing and peaceful to see the harmony among members, to see that when one has moved a motion for a return, one accepts a motion for a return, and sometimes really questions why there's need for considerable debate thereafter. The only point.

Please proceed.

Ridley Grain Ltd.

M34. Dr. Nicol moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies prepared by or on behalf of the government, the Prince Rupert grain terminal board of directors, and Ridley Grain Ltd. for the period January 1, 1995, to April 21, 1997, evaluating the level of grain throughput required to meet annual principal and interest payments under the financing agreements between the government and Ridley Grain Ltd.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, in an attempt to keep the harmony flowing – first advice on this particular motion was that indeed it should be a reject on grounds which I cited last week. Those references are numerous, but I can go through them again for the member if he would like. *Beauchesne* 446(2)(e) and 446(4)(a) allow for nondisclosure if the disclosure has or could result in some financial either gain or loss to the person or persons from whom the information is being required.

Mr. Speaker, again I think the record will show clearly that I am always of a mind to give all information possible. Where it refers to information for which the government is directly responsible, I make every effort to make sure that information is forthcoming.

The references here indicate that the government can actually be put in a position of compromise by releasing information which in fact has to do with another business or entity without the permission of that business or entity, without them waiving their right to

disclosure. It's a difficult situation, because then it looks like the government is withholding the information when in truth that is not the fact in this particular situation. We are bound, unfortunately or fortunately, by certain legal parameters. Where it comes to disclosure of this type, this is one of the restraints which we're under.

Now, there was a suggestion made last week that these companies for which these agreements were signed – before the 1993 administration, I might add and remind people – should have signed them saying that they don't have the right to that type of disclosure protection. Well, that's a great afterthought, and hindsight is 20/20. If there were to be similar provisions – I can't anticipate what those provisions would be because we now have a business limitations Act, which we've imposed on ourselves, which forbids government from getting into these types of arrangements anymore. If there was something that was applicable and the Legislature did approve of, then certainly we would be of a mind to write in a statement which says that particular company or entity has no right of refusal to information. Unfortunately, we're bound to prior agreements. I'm not happy about it, but we are bound and limited by that. For those reasons the advice from officials was to simply reject this. I wasn't happy with that particular advice and want to make something available to the member here.

2:50

In looking at the motion again and looking at it more closely, it says and is asking for “copies of studies prepared by or on behalf of the government” – and then it begins to list these other entities – “the Prince Rupert grain terminal board of directors, and Ridley Grain Ltd.” I do not have the freedom to extract from their files information which was done for them, but I did ask officials to look and see what we may have done as a government, what we may have asked for. In fact, there was some instruction given to the department of agriculture to do some research in terms of grain throughput and volumes. Though it has not been made available to this date, I asked the question: what is the legal impediment to that information being released? Maybe there's some discomfort with releasing it, but is there any legal impediment? In fact, there is none. In that case what I would like to do, if the member wants that information, is to release that particular information for which this government is responsible.

Given that offering, what I am proposing to do is amend Motion 34 as follows: by striking out everything after the words “on behalf of the government.” I'm saying I can speak for government, but as far as these other entities, I'm not going to be responsible for extracting information from them. I'm pleased to strike those words out and add the following:

For the period January 1, 1995, to April 21, 1997, evaluating the level of grain throughput at the Prince Rupert grain terminal.

If the member is interested in that information – and I would hope he would be – I am more than pleased to release that particular information. So I offer that as an amendment, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. NICOL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the amendment, this isn't quite the data that we wanted. We wanted to be able to look at the throughput that would come through the terminal before we as a province would be able to anticipate some payment on our interest and principal. Given the level of projections that are being provided by this data, I think this will give us a groundwork

from which we can look at some additional information that we have in terms of the costing structure and be able to calculate those kind of trigger points on our own. So we accept this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

[Motion as amended carried]

Ridley Grain Ltd.

M35. Dr. Nicol moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all financing agreements and amended financing agreements relating to participating first mortgage bonds and series A participating debentures between the government and Ridley Grain Ltd. for the period January 1, 1984, to April 30, 1997.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Again, Mr. Speaker, there were suggestions that this would also qualify simply as a rejection because of the fact that there are other parties involved. However, in the hope of maintaining harmony and good co-operation and a good spirit of collegiality with our friends across the floor, I've tried to do what I can to get them as much information as I can. Again for the purpose of the record I will have to refer to *Beauchesne* 446(2)(e), which does allow for nondisclosure of information if it has some kind of financial impact, either a gain or a loss, on persons involved. It also refers to the fact that disclosure of nonpublic supplementary documents could have negative effects. So I'm bound by that.

Erskine May also is instructive here. Section 16(2)C(1)(j)(vii)(3) also is an application here in that information or records may be refused, especially if they pertain to companies or other bodies that are not under the statutory authority or control of the government, which in the case of this company would apply. That would be a case, then, where disclosure of the information may be refused on the grounds of that public policy. Again I'm under some restraint there, and I know that in the past this could be used to just do an overall blanket rejection.

There's also an interesting item which I have to refer to under our freedom of information provisions in the Act. Section 15 actually provides for a mandatory exemption from disclosure of commercial, financial information of a third party business unless the third party consents to the disclosure.

The key financing agreements here are actually public information, and, Mr. Speaker, those aspects of the agreements are available through the registrar of companies in Victoria, British Columbia. Ridley Grain has already been contacted about disclosure of the supplementary agreements.

I've done two things here. We have ascertained that the financing agreements can be obtained and are accessible through the registrar of companies in Victoria, British Columbia. Not wanting to deprive the opposition researchers of an opportunity to do some work, I can refer them to that source, and I'm sure they wouldn't mind accessing that information on the key elements. Then again, not wanting to simply dismiss this as something that could be rejected, we have contacted Ridley Grain and asked if they would be willing to disclose some of the supplementary information which the member is interested in. To date we have not received any response on that. So I haven't simply left it unattended, Mr. Speaker. In fact we're doing what we can. We've found out where the key items are located, which can be

accessed, and we have asked Ridley Grain if they would agree to disclosure of the supplementary information, and I'm awaiting their response.

Given that we've made those attempts, I'm proposing an amendment here so that we don't simply reject out of hand that particular information. I'd like to amend Motion for a Return 35 as follows: by adding the words "not otherwise available to the public" – in other words, if it's out there and it's in the public domain, we shouldn't be expending tax dollars associated to our research people to get that information – and then

and for which all parties to the nonpublic agreements consent to the release of those agreements so that no potential legal liability is imposed on the taxpayer.

That would be after the words "April 30, 1997."

Two items, Mr. Speaker. If it's in the public domain, let's leave that there to be accessed by whoever wants it. For those items that aren't in the public domain, I can't put at risk a potential legal action by releasing information for which I don't have that authority or approval. Something may happen over the next few days – who knows? – in terms of a response from Ridley Grain. It may be in the affirmative, but I can't presume that, so I'm proposing this amendment today.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'd be pleased to accept the amendment. I understand the conditions that the Treasurer has announced in terms of the access to this data. I appreciate his finding the information that's available through the B.C. corporate registry for us. We'll wait and deal with the potential of getting the others as Ridley Grain responds to their request for the opportunity to disclose that. So I thank them, and we'll accept the amendment.

[Motion as amended carried]

3:00 Lloydminster Biprovincial Upgrader

M37. Dr. Nicol moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies prepared by or for the government, other joint venture partners, the joint venture board, or outside consultants between June 1, 1993, and May 6, 1997, assessing the future economic viability of the Lloydminster biprovincial upgrader and projections for annual upside interest payments to Alberta over a 20-year period commencing January 1995.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have to reject this motion, and I want to discuss this. There are several motions here that I'll be addressing this afternoon, but I think I'll start off on this one to give the premise for rejection. Perhaps it will lead to discussion among the opposition's caucus as to the proper submission of motions for returns in the future.

This Motion 37 relates to the biprovincial upgrader and the upside interest. There are two types of studies being requested under this motion, the first dealing with the viability of the upgrader and the second dealing with projections of annual upside interest payments. Any such studies like this would be viewed by the remaining partners in the upgrader, Husky and the government of Saskatchewan, as proprietary, and the release of such studies could be to their commercial detriment.

Now, under the rules of the House for notices of motions for production of papers, it's very well spelled out in *Beauchesne*. I would refer to 446, page 129, in which it states that there are criteria to be used about information to be requested such as this. It starts out in 446. It says:

- (1) To enable Members of Parliament [or this House] to secure factual information about the operations of Government to carry out their parliamentary duties and to make public as much factual information as possible, consistent with effective administration, the protection of the security of the state, rights to privacy . . .

These are private companies, and you've done that two or three times today in asking for information.

- . . . and other such matters, government papers, documents and consultant reports should be produced on Notice of Motion . . . unless falling within the categories outlined below, in which case an exemption is to be claimed from production.

- (2) The following criteria are to be applied in determining if the government papers or documents should be exempt from production.

Now, I'm going to go through these, because as we spend, over the last several years, hours in this Assembly rejecting – and I have to go back into my department and go through and pick up reams of documents and papers, and a lot of them, when I come to 446, just can't be brought forward in this House. I would think that as I go through these criteria – you know, as you're preparing those, as the opposition, you might consider retracting some of your motions or redrafting them.

"The following criteria are to be applied in determining if the government papers or documents should be exempt from production." Now, these won't all apply to this one, but there are others coming up, and I'll be able to address those too.

- (a) Legal opinions or advice provided for the use of the government.
- (b) Papers, the release of which would be detrimental to the security of the State.
- (c) Papers dealing with international relations, the release of which might be detrimental to the future conduct of Canada's foreign relations; (the release of papers received from other countries to be subject to the consent of the originating country).
- (d) Papers, the release of which might be detrimental to the future conduct of federal-provincial relations or the relations of provinces . . . (the release of papers received from provinces to be subject to the consent of the originating province).

The previous one: I don't know whether the province of British Columbia would have had a statement on that, the previous one you requested that the hon. Treasurer addressed. Of course, that operation is in British Columbia.

- (e) Papers containing information, the release of which could allow or result in direct personal financial gain or loss by a person or a group of persons.

Of course, that's coming close to this case today, as you want to get internal documents on the future viability of the biprovincial upgrader, of which we no longer are owners.

- (f) Papers reflecting on the personal competence or character of an individual.
- (g) Papers of a voluminous character or which would require an inordinate cost or length of time to prepare.

Again, it was related previously by the hon. Treasurer. That was one of the reasons there. These are in the public domain. You want us to take our research and spend taxpayers dollars. That was covered right there.

- (h) Papers relating to the business of the Senate.

That's not relevant to this House.

- (i) Papers, the release of which would be personally embarrass-

ing to Her Majesty or the Royal Family or official representatives of Her Majesty.

I don't think you've done that here with Husky.

- (j) Papers relating to negotiations leading up to a contract until the contract has been executed or the negotiations have been concluded.

Now, in some of these you're getting close. You'll say that this one's been concluded.

- (k) Papers that are excluded from disclosure by statute.
- (l) Cabinet documents and those documents which include a Privy Council confidence.

Of course, as we go forth to one of these, it's getting close to the department and to the running of their own operation, and you'll see on one of the ones coming up that I'll have to make reference to some of these to do that.

- (m) Any proceedings before a court of justice or a judicial inquiry of any sort.
- (n) Papers that are private or confidential and not of a public or official character.
- (o) Internal departmental memoranda.

Now, sometimes you ask for studies or for consultants' reports as they relate internally to some decision we made or some policy that we have, and those are internal department memoranda. Those are not, unless we consent to it, privy to presentation or demand by motions for returns.

- (p) Papers requested, submitted or received in confidence by the Government from sources outside the Government.

That's the nailer right there. For these here, I would have to go and ask Husky or the government of Saskatchewan – that was covered higher where it was another government – because those documents, as it relates to their internal operations of their business, are received in confidence by governments, so we can't bring them in here to the detriment of their operations.

Now, that was very lengthy, but I think it stands. The Provincial Treasurer was saying the same thing under different readings, but as I said, I think it would stand well. This does go on. I'm not going to read any more. That gives you the direction that I am taking here, but I think it will help your understanding of why we reject some and why we accept others. So on this start here – I have two more coming up – we'll reject Motion 37.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close the debate.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Minister of Energy talk about why they were going to reject this motion. I guess when I put in my mind the material we were asking for through this motion, I didn't see really anything that he triggered in the list of materials he read that would in essence really convince me that any of them were directly and in absolute a reason for rejecting. If we don't ask, we don't get the government's judgment as to the way those materials fit some of these criteria.

As an example, in the one that they talked about as "internal departmental memoranda," he comments that if it's something that is confidential to the background of a decision that's made by a minister or by the Executive Council on recommendation from a minister, that can be classed as internal, confidential, and nonavailable through a motion for a return. If we don't ask for it, we don't find out whether or not it's available. We have to go ahead and make the request before we can find out if they judge it to be critical enough to put into that category of protected material. We know it's there. We know the studies were done. We know they're available. Sometimes they're available directly by release from the minister without a request. Sometimes they're

released on a request through a motion for a return or through a question in question period. Other times they reject the access to these materials. Then we end up with a situation that comes about, and we have to follow the processes of the Legislature. Anyway, we end up then dealing with these.

3:10

The other issue the minister brought out was the matters that are received in confidence. Well, internal studies are not received in confidence by the government. They're done by the government. What we're dealing with here is asking for information that has nothing to do with the internal operations of the now privatized joint venture, the now privatized upgrader. We're asking for information in terms of: at what level of activity of that upgrader do we get our upside interest payments? We want to know what the trigger points are in terms of volume or in terms of gross sales, in terms of whatever measure they triggered those on. At what level does that start? Then how can we expect a return as people of Alberta, as taxpayers of Alberta, as interested participants in Alberta? At what level can we expect to see some of those dollars come back to us? It's got nothing to do with the internal operations of the company. It's got nothing to do with their activities. It's only: how does that trigger point get defined? How do they as a government monitor it so they know that we're being treated openly and fairly and that we're getting the dollars we are eligible for?

So I take exception to every one of the points that the minister raised in terms of his rejection of this. I don't see any one of them being, in my mind, a criterion that would allow for a rejection of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

Westaim Technologies Inc.

M38. Dr. Nicol moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all memoranda of understanding, MOUs, between the government, Sherritt Gordon Mines Limited, and Westaim Technologies Inc. between January 1, 1990, and May 6, 1997.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, for Motion for a Return 38 I had discussion with the sponsor of the motion, and we debated how we would handle this motion. I was going to put an amendment through to change the motion, or I was going to reject the motion, or I was going to accept the motion and then communicate with the hon. member later. The fact is that we decided we would accept the motion but make it perfectly clear that my response would have to be zero because there are not any memoranda of understanding between the government, Sherritt Gordon, and Westaim Technologies between January 1, 1990, and May 6, 1997. So we would be accepting the motion, but in fact, so all the House knows, there aren't any. Then we will work on a different question and information later on, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close debate.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The basis for this request was a reference made in one of the Sherritt corporate profiles where they made reference to agreements that were put in place with Westaim Technologies and the aspect that these had. We

wanted to find out if that information was available and if it was in position.

In conversations with the minister the other day she said that that was not done in the form of a memorandum of understanding, so I guess what it amounts to is that in order to get our materials more clearly specified, we've got to rework this motion and try again. So I accept the explanation that the minister gave us the other day, and based on the way we put it in, I accept her rejection.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I heard the Deputy Government House Leader saying that she was going to accept the motion.

DR. NICOL: But not give an answer. I was talking about not giving the answer. It's beside the point.

[Motion carried]

Suncor Inc.

M39. Dr. Nicol moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all royalty assistance agreements between the government and Suncor Inc. between January 1, 1992, and May 6, 1997.

DR. WEST: Now, Mr. Speaker, after the long introduction to rejecting the last one, I'm going to accept this motion for a return, but it is of the same nature in some regards as the first one, with some difference. Again the hon. Treasurer had referred to some of these differences. It asks for documents that are already in the public domain. This one asks for all of the copies of Suncor agreements since 1992. The Alberta Suncor/Crown amendment agreement number one was done by OC 108 in '95, March 1, and is already a public document, so we'll be giving you back a public document that you could have got ahold of. OC 245/96, dated June 12, 1996: again the memorandum of understanding is already a public document.

Now, the last one is the Suncor/Crown agreement, the second amendment and transition agreement dated March 5, 1997. This is a legal document implementing the terms agreed to in the June 12, 1996, memorandum of understanding, and it isn't a public document. But again, as I had said before, we went and asked Suncor if it would be detrimental to their business operations in releasing this. They checked and they said, no, they have no problem with it being released. So counter to the discussion on the Husky and the agreements between Husky, the Saskatchewan government, and coming backwards to us, this one is accepted because of Suncor, and without their permission I wouldn't be doing that.

Given that, you could have taken two of these documents and found them yourself, and again, you could have asked Suncor.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's his job to ask.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close debate, unless of course the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert wants the floor.

DR. NICOL: That's fine, Mr. Speaker. She's just going to prompt me from the back.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member? She's going to . . .

DR. NICOL: She's going to prompt me from the back. That's all right.

THE SPEAKER: I'm glad it was "prompt."

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to thank the minister for accepting this motion. It provides us with an opportunity, and I think the fact that the minister actually went to Suncor to get the information provides a much stronger request than if we do it as members of the opposition, and this is an easy way for us to make sure that we get the information. I thank both the minister and his staff for the efforts that were taken, and from now on we will watch the OCs a little more closely to make sure we're catching the information.

[Motion carried]

Foreign Trade Initiatives

M40. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the 1995-96 and 1996-97 statistical summary or activity reports prepared by the government for each of the foreign trade offices or delegations indicating the number of Alberta companies assisted, companies by sector, number of inquiries, contacts, meetings by type, number of Alberta promotions, and number of trade missions or government meetings.

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. BLACK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Once again I had a discussion with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark with regard to this motion under her name and indicated to her that I would be putting forward an amendment to the motion, again in keeping with trying to provide as much information as possible to our colleagues across the way. This amendment basically will move along the motion and will strike out "companies by sector" and "by type" after "meetings." We don't categorize the information in that form, so we don't have it. The rest of the information we do have, and we do have, I think, the thrust of what she's looking for. Therefore, I'd like to move an amendment to Motion for a Return 40.

3:20

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've communicated with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark as well, and she's agreed to the amendment. She accepts the motion as it will be stated as amended.

Thank you.

[Motion as amended carried]

Royalty Tax Credit Program

M41. Dr. Nicol moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government evaluating the Alberta royalty tax credit program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This is the last one under mine, and I'll have to reject this one. I can relate back to the discussion we had a week ago on 446 in *Beauchesne* and go down to (o), which is under (2). It says, "Internal departmental memoranda." This paper they're asking for is a policy paper prepared for ministers, and it's not suitable for public distribution in its form. There are a lot of internal working documents prepared to bring forth policies. They're done as memorandums between ministers and departments before the actual policy is structured. Again, as I stated, they're not suitable for public presentation. So a good intentioned motion, but regretfully under *Beauchesne* they not only don't have to be produced, but we feel they're not in a form that is suitable to be produced.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to conclude debate.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again this is another one of those questions in terms of internal documents we've requested, and we have to ask for them to find out whether or not they are potentially available. In response to the minister's comments about, you know, the need to protect internal documents, one of the things that is not available in *Beauchesne* is the kind of information that would allow us to judge the importance of a document to a government in terms of protection of it. What we may want to look at at some point in time is putting in our own Standing Orders some information that would provide some guidelines so that people outside the Executive Council can have some judgment as to what requests are likely to be accepted and which are not.

Right now we're at a point where if we want to take a chance on seeing it, we have to make the request either through a phone call to the department or through the process of motions for returns to find out whether or not we're going to get it. We've used the motion for a return option here because of the ease with which we can deal with them and also the directness with which we can get questions and answers going in the Legislative Assembly.

So as the process prevails, I have to report that I'm disappointed we didn't get the information here, but maybe my suggestions can lead to some clearer work in the future on these kinds of materials.

[Motion lost]

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

Bill 209
School Amendment Act, 1997

[Debate adjourned June 10: Dr. Massey speaking]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 209. I believe that Bill 209 is a wake-up call for Albertans. The Bill has generated some interesting, sometimes heated lobbying by both those in favour of the Bill, of increasing private school funding, and those opposed. I've been accused of conspiracy and many other ulterior motives by some rather vociferous and interested constituents.

The Bill is, I believe, a wake-up call, because if you look at the

Bill and you look at it historically, as the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View did for us briefly the last day we debated this, it really asks us a question. That question is: do we want to create a second school system, a private system supported by public dollars? I think that's exactly where Bill 209 would lead us. Admittedly, it would be a different system from the public system we know, given the fierce independence of private schools and the independent schools, but it would nevertheless be a system. If Bill 209 is passed and takes its place in that progress towards what will eventually be a request for 100 percent funding, requests for school facilities, then once 100 percent funding has been achieved, I think the direction is rather clear, and we are going to have a second system.

I say "second" because some people maintain that we have two public systems in this province, but that's not legally correct. We have one public system. If you go back to I guess the classic, Peter Bagen's book *The Legal Status of the Canadian Public School Pupil*, Bagen makes that point very well. He says:

The term "separate school" is often not clearly defined or understood in general usage. Legally, separate schools are public schools of a special kind.

He goes on to say:

Separate schools, however, are and remain an integral part of the public school system and are subject to control by the same central authorities.

I think he makes the case and makes it clear that we have one public system in this province. This, I think, if it's carried to its logical conclusion, would create a second.

As we look at Bill 209, we could look back at what we've been trying to do with publicly funded education since the province was created. Cremin has described what Horace Mann, one of the earliest North American advocates of common schools, envisioned. I think it's the root of what many of us in this province believe about public schools. Cremin says:

Mann's school would be common, not as a school for the common people – but a school common to all people. It would be open to all, provided by the state and the local community as the birthright of every child. It would be for rich and poor alike, not only free but as good as any private institution [of the time]. It would be nonsectarian, receiving children of all creeds, classes, and backgrounds. In the warm associations of childhood Mann saw the opportunity to kindle a spirit of amity and respect which the conflicts of adult life could never destroy.

And it was in that social harmony that Mann saw located the primary goal of education.

It goes on to say:

The genius of Mann's design and the hub of a built-in dynamism . . . was the vesting of political control in the people. Through . . . legislatures and local boards of education, popularly elected representatives rather than professional school [people] would exercise ultimate oversight.

So I think that if you go back to the public school movement on this continent, Horace Mann was influential, and that was the vision that was carried north of the border.

At the same time, there were advocates. John A. Macdonald wanted a common school. He wanted common public schools with nonsectarian religious education but accepted, given the history of our country, the necessity of some sort of separate provision for Roman Catholics. Central in the public school movement in Canada was Ryerson, who was also dedicated to nondenominational schooling. He established a strong central supervision of common schools while trying to protect and clarify the place of separate schools. So our history in Canada was a little bit different originally in that Ryerson saw school people

having a paramount role in the direction of common schools or public schools.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

In Alberta that hasn't been the case. In this city the first public school was created long before there was a municipal council. The first public school was created long before the province itself existed. Our history as a province is a history of strong local control over the school district and school district affairs from elected representatives.

3:30

So that notion of a common school, a school that would have shared experiences for all children in the province, has been the vision that has been carried forward. That was changed somewhat with the history the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View outlined last day with, first, the private mission schools receiving some funding and then on to 1967 with Bill 29.

If you've listened to the debate, we've heard a lot of debate focused on rights. I have a stack of letters – I believe we have close to 500 letters on the topic now – and those letters are filled with the rhetoric of rights: the rights of individuals in this province, their rights as taxpayers. They pay taxes and that entitles them to certain rights, and they have pointed out those rights rather graphically in some cases: the right for that taxpayer's money to be spent in a way they think most appropriate, and that includes both those who say it should be spent on private schools and those who say their money shouldn't be spent on private schools. We've heard the rights of parents; this has been paramount in this discussion. What do parents want for their children, and what are their rights to determine what education should be?

Naturally, we've heard the rights of religious groups outlined clearly and very extensively in terms of their beliefs about the kinds of rights that they should enjoy as believers in a particular philosophy or religious base. I've heard a great deal about rights from nonreligious groups and how they feel that their rights as supporters of no religious orientation are being infringed upon by this proposal.

We've heard lots about the rights of minority group members and how minority groups should be treated as opposed to the majority in our society. We've heard a great deal about the rights of majority group members too.

In all of this rhetoric, if you go through it – and it would be interesting, after this is all decided, if someone went back and did a content analysis of those submissions – how little talk there is about our responsibilities and how little talk there has been about our obligations. I've heard little of our responsibility to provide an excellent education to all children of the province, very, very little of our obligations to all children, not just the children that belong to our particular beliefs or don't belong to our particular beliefs. That's been missing, as far as I can tell, from the debate.

I've heard a little about our responsibility to treat all children and adolescents of the province of Alberta fairly. I'm sure that from a student perspective it's hard to understand how on one side of the street he or she is worth a certain amount of support from the government in terms of education and across the street a playmate is worth something quite different. So I've heard little about our responsibility to treat all children fairly.

There has been some but not as much as we would expect on our responsibility to provide shared experiences that will prepare students, as adults, to work as citizens of a democracy, in

particular our democracy in one of the most favoured provinces in one of the most favoured countries in the world. I've heard little of what those shared experiences should be, what we want all our children growing up and believing about this great country, and exactly what kinds of values we should be fostering in our school systems.

I've heard little of our responsibility to create locally responsible schools that foster excellence and are flexible in meeting the wishes of a diverse citizen group. That diversity and the talk about the diversity and making the school systems sensitive to that diversity while maintaining a central focus and central values for all children has not been much of a part of the discussion. And although there's been a lot of talk about money, I've heard very little of our responsibility to ensure that money is not a barrier by providing the education we need for young children to families cost free.

So I go back. We've heard a great deal about rights, a lot of breast beating about individual and group right, but very little about responsibilities and where we're going. I think it's those differences between rights and responsibilities and our obligations as citizens that strike at the very underlying principles and assumptions of Bill 209. I believe that those assumptions and those principles are worthy of public discussion before Bill 209 or anything like it is voted upon. I think they raise a variety of public policy questions, and those questions I think are becoming clearer as the debate on this Bill has continued.

One of the first questions I think we have to ask is: how can we reconcile the majority belief in an excellent, strong, and open public education system while meeting the diverse expectations of those Albertans who desire the exclusiveness of a private school education for their children to be paid from the public purse? That's a rather serious problem, and I think it's one that there has to be further public debate upon. It strikes at the heart of Bill 209.

Another question: to what extent, if any, should private schools that serve private interests be funded from the public purse? Private schools serve private interests. The question is: how much of that should be financed from the public purse?

I'd like to see debated the question of: to what extent should school systems receiving public funds be allowed to exclude students? Again, we've heard a lot of talk. I'd like that more widely debated.

How do we ensure the same measure of public control and accountability provided by locally elected school boards for private school operations? If we accept that private schools should be funded 75 percent, 100 percent, then how would we ensure the same accountability for citizens in this city and across the province as through locally elected boards? How do we ensure that control and that accountability?

How can we best ensure equal funding for all Alberta school-children? That's been asked by both sides on Bill 209. It strikes at who we are as a society. How do we make sure that all children are funded equally? Does it mean that as adults we're going to have to make some compromises to make that possible while not really compromising some of our basic beliefs?

Should citizens who do not use a tax-supported service be allowed to opt out of paying taxes for that service? I found that rather an interesting part of some of the submissions that were forwarded to us. It's an interesting notion. If you don't use a service, then should you be able to opt out of it and say: "I want those tax dollars. I don't use the parks, so then I shouldn't have to pay that portion of my tax dollar. I want that returned so I can

use that money to pay for a vacation in Vancouver.”? That's a whole new interesting notion. Can you opt out of the tax system and use that money for your own purposes? Or if you're doing what the tax system is doing out of your own pocket, are you entitled to a refund from the tax system? I'm sure that could lead us down some interesting roads.

I guess for the private school people I would ask: will the passing of Bill 209 solve the long-term problems of financing private schools? Or, as I believe it is and as the history of private schools in the province I think tells us, is it a step along the way to full funding?

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I'll vote against Bill 209 for a variety of reasons. Paramount among them is my belief in the need for shared experiences and programs that our public schools provide all Alberta students. I go back to Mann.

He sought a common value system within which diversity might flourish. His quest was for a new public philosophy, a sense of community to be shared by those of every background and persuasion. And his instrument in this effort would be the common school.

I would think that's still a worthy goal worth pursuing and that we don't abandon the public schools. However, I will also urge the government to address the fundamental problems of fairness, accountability, and the extent to which the public obligation to all children that Bill 209 raises is being met.

I would conclude by saying that Bill 209 is a useful Bill, Mr. Speaker. It draws our attention to just how far some would support private interests with public dollars. This is not a decision that should be made by default through the support of a private member's Bill in the dying days of a postelection spring session. It's a decision that involves all Albertans, and they deserve to have their say.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. MAR: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday afternoon and this afternoon I've had the opportunity to listen to both the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View and the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. These are two members who have brought forward arguments on Bill 209 and two members that I have a great deal of respect for and whom I have often found to be persuasive on various issues that we have debated in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I think the comments that both of them make when they talk about the historical background of support for public education and the emersion of private schools as well in a historic context really characterize the sensitivity of the debate on Bill 209. I've certainly traveled to schools in the province of Alberta. I have a very good sense of what the public education system is about and also what the independent school system is about. I understand the strong support that people have who support the public education system, but I also understand the strong sentiments of those who see private schools as an attractive alternative.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, our public education system is based on a simple statement that is not arguable, and I don't think people would argue against that. That is that all children in the province of

Alberta have the right to a quality education at the public expense. I believe that our public education system, in all its variety, fulfills that principle. It offers a public education to all students in Alberta no matter where they live or what their social, health, or economic circumstances are. The public education system provides quality by offering a wide range of choices backed by solid core programs. Parents can choose public or separate schools, alternative programs, charter schools, home schooling or a blend of home and school instruction, distance learning, and they can also choose off-site learning through virtual schools. I also believe the diversity in the public education system prepares students for citizenship in our equally diverse society. This quality and choice are fully supported by tax dollars. We all have a responsibility to support the public education system whether or not we have children and whether or not they attend public school, because we all benefit from living in an educated society.

Property taxes are supplemented by the general revenue fund to ensure appropriate support for public education. In return for full public support public schools must provide an education to any student of any faith or creed in any circumstance and regardless of the cost. By contrast, Mr. Speaker, private schools set their own guidelines for acceptance and can refuse admission for any reason.

Parents who send their children to private schools rightfully point out that their children are entitled to an education at the public expense. The right to a public education, however, does not mean a right to have any education fully paid for by the public. We do provide support to private schools out of the general revenue fund to make these schools a more affordable option because we do believe in choice, but I believe that with that right comes responsibility. With the right to choose a private education also comes the responsibility to contribute to the cost. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I do not support Bill 209.

Now, in fairness, Mr. Speaker, the independent schools association has asked for a task force to be struck to assess the rules and regulations that apply to private school funding, and I am prepared to establish such a task force to make such a review and develop recommendations. Accordingly, I cannot support Bill 209 at this time. However, I am prepared to investigate further the issues that have been raised by both public school supporters as well as independent school supporters.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to this very important Bill before the House. I want to thank the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View for bringing the Bill to the House so that we can engage in public debate over this exceedingly important issue of the presence and role of private schools alongside our education system and the question of funding private schools in this context.

I have read very carefully the speech the hon. member made in the House yesterday, June 10, so I speak from the position that I take seriously the arguments the hon. member has made. I've also listened with due attention to the eloquent defence of the public school system that's been made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and why it is that the increase in funding for private schools stipulated in this Bill should be opposed.

I grew up in a highly diverse and complex society, so I want to speak briefly, with your permission, to my own experience as

someone who went to school in an educational system where different groups – religious, social, ethnic, and you name it – had the opportunity and the right to establish their own schools. Many of my age cohorts when I was going to elementary school, junior high school did not have the opportunity to experience the educational process in a way that would bring us to view each other and the communities from which we came as equals, as equal citizens in our very complex society.

3:50

During my own lifetime the divisions within that society grew. I can't explain and account for the growth of those divisions and cleavages exclusively with reference to the role that this segmented educational system that existed there played in the process, but surely it is clear to me, based on my own firsthand knowledge first as a student and then as a teacher in that school system, that the way in which that segmented school system operated produced young people who had a segmented consciousness, a segmented view of the society of which they were a part, a different view of rights and privileges and duties of different groups that constituted that society.

As all of us were growing up into adulthood to take up our rights and duties as full-fledged citizens of a fledgling democracy, many of us began to realize the problems that we were facing then. Now, we were trying to create a nation out of our diverse population. We were striving to create a national identity and awareness within which we could see each other and deal with each other and relate to each other as equal citizens, and we saw that there were difficulties, that there was the perception of irreconcilable conflicts among many of the communities from which we came, and that we somehow had internalized the notion of irreconcilability of those conflicts because we went through the segmented school system.

We were never confronted. We were never permitted the opportunity to sit together in a social 20 class, a social 30 class, the equivalent of it, to confront these issues, to address these issues of diversity yet social harmony at the same time, that is required if a society, if a community is to engage in its own development, is to engage in providing opportunities and conditions and circumstances in which all of us can strive to be what we want to be and exercise our choices freely and openly and pursue opportunities in a manner that would not be perceived as a challenge to the rights of others who pursue the same opportunities.

My point, then, is that in a diverse, pluralistic society the role of a publicly funded school system, the idea of an educational system based on a common school to which all the children of a society have the right to go, have the opportunity to go to learn about each other, is an essential one. That diversity requires the presence of this kind of unifying institution.

I submit to my colleagues in the House that in Canada we have a society that is diverse, that is pluralistic in religious terms, in racial terms, in ethnic terms, in terms of the history of communities, in terms of the history of settlement in this country. Different communities arrived on the scene at different times with different views of what their place is in this society. So we've been struggling, I think I should confess, rather successfully with recognizing our diversity, which has been increasing, particularly over the last 30 years.

I've been in this country for 36 years, and I've seen that diversity grow. I've seen the diversity also contribute to the richness of this society, yet because of the kind of public institutions that have been available to us, we've been able to deal with

increasing diversity in a way which enhances our ability to achieve social harmony rather than make it more difficult for us to do so. Cleavages along ethnic, social, racial, religious lines have been minimal, and I think we should all be proud of the fact that we've been able to achieve such a high degree of harmony in our society thanks to the current institutions and the kind of leadership that we've been fortunate enough to have available to us to build this society.

I would like to see us continue to build this society along the lines of social harmony, social cohesion, but we must face the future with a full awareness of the fact that we are becoming more diverse, and when we are more diverse, the potential for cleavages increases unless we all as politicians, as parents, as social activists, as social reformers pay due attention to the fact that social harmony cannot be taken for granted.

Public education of the kind that we have had in this country up to this point – I'm hopeful that this will continue to be the case – is a key element if not the only element which guarantees social harmony in the future. Private schools certainly are an expression of the choices that parents and certain communities make with full knowledge of the fact that there is available without any restriction to their children a fully publicly funded open school system, to which all of us including them have the right to send their children if they so choose.

If they want to make a very different choice, it is their right, but to ask public authorities, to ask taxpayers in general to pay for schools which in fact take pride in being exclusive – that's why they're private. The *raison d'être* for their existence in organizing activities in the manner in which they do is precisely exclusivity. That they are different, that they want to be different, that they do not want intrusion of public authority over their ability to organize those activities in a way that they themselves would choose to do, given the fact that they are exclusive institutions, given the fact that they want to be exclusive institutions not only in the manner in which they organize their affairs but also because of the way in which they want to select students who can enter those institutions, they have the right, they deserve the right, and rightly so, to exclude those students that they think are not suitable for the particular kind of goals and purposes and values with which they want the institutions to guide them.

These schools are also exclusive in a third sense. Many of them charge fairly heavy tuition fees. The notion of tuition fees charged for K to 12 offends the basic principle of free, universally accessible education for all children, accessible in the sense of there being available to them quality education, as the hon. Minister of Education has just reminded us. The fact that tuition fees are charged by these schools is a third barrier to their being open to all.

4:00

Accountability to public authority is severely limited in the way they want to operate. On one side, this is what private schools want to do. They want to remain private. Surely, in terms of this Bill, what's sought is increased funding if not complete funding for them. I must confess that although my party accepts the status quo, the present funding arrangement for private schools, personally I'm comfortable with it, particularly in view of what we have done to our own educational system over the last 10 or 15 years. I think we have increased the choice within the public school system to the point where it appears to me that there's no need for private schools anymore. If choice is what these schools are about, then the larger choice now, an increasing amount of choice is available within our own school system.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View does refer to the growth of charter schools within our public school system, and I want to draw her attention to the fact that that increases choice. Those who want to add a particular flavour to the education that their children get I think have ample opportunity to operate within the school system without fragmenting it completely yet have the right, the opportunity to exercise that choice.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I would find it very difficult to support this Bill. I gave two sets of reasons. The growing complexity in our own society, the growing diversity within our society requires us in fact to strengthen those institutions which provide us with experiences which are formative experiences that we all share so that it develops some sense of common purpose, common commitment, common understanding, common identity.

I also drew your attention to my experiences in other lands where the existence of social institutions in fact exacerbated a sense of difference. The fact that that exacerbation of differences was the result of a variety of institutions, including schools, that contributed to it in a significant way cautioned me about supporting a Bill like this. I would hope that we would exercise our right to vote for or against in light of both sets of reasons that I've given. The historical experience of other societies which have been pluralistic, diverse, but have not been successful in forging, if you wish, common institutions that provide experiences that would bring us together. Secondly, the increasing diversity here, with which we have to deal as we move into the next century, I think calls upon us to strengthen institutions. That will in fact bring us together rather than make us different from each other.

So for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be opposed to this Bill and will be voting against it. Thank you.

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

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to be proposing an amendment to the motion under debate, and I wonder if I could have the pages distribute that amendment while I make a few brief remarks to Bill 209. The amendment is at the Table.

Mr. Speaker, I've been participating in this discussion to a very large extent, as I'm sure all members of the Assembly have been over the past few weeks while the public debate has been taking place with respect to Bill 209. Frankly, it's one of the issues that we have discussed in this Legislature that has caused the most discussion and the most debate in the public circle in quite some time. It's generated certainly the most mail for my offices and, I understand, for the offices of most of the members of the Legislature. Frankly, I find that the issue is a healthy debate, and I congratulate the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View for bringing this forward. That we are here today discussing this issue I think emphasizes the fact that this is an important issue and needs to be discussed. It's been something that has been on the sidelines, so to speak, for a number of years, and we have finally got it to a point where we can have some broad-based discussion in the Legislature.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that the process that we are going through here is a somewhat shortened process. I'm not so sure that all members have had ample opportunity to fully understand all of the related issues. I'm not so sure that the public has had an opportunity to fully discuss and appreciate all of the various issues that are related to this Bill. That's why I was very gratified to hear earlier this afternoon the Minister of Education indicate that he would be committed to

introducing and forming a task force to look at all of the ramifications regarding funding of private schools. I commend the minister for that recommendation this afternoon, and it's for that reason that I am proposing that the following amendment be debated. I would move that amendment now, and I'll read it into the record. I will propose

that the motion for second reading of Bill 209 be amended by deleting all the words after the word "that" and substituting the following: Bill 209, School Amendment Act, 1997, be not now read a second time but that it be a read a second time this day 10 months hence.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this is a reasonable amendment in light of the fact that the minister is proposing to put together a task force that will finally look at this issue that has been in the public arena for quite some time, and it's always been bounced around from one area to the other. I think this is a positive move. I think it's very positive that the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View has got the Bill to the floor of the Legislature, but frankly I think that it's appropriate that this task force have an opportunity to speak to Albertans and to report back with their findings before the Legislature goes any further with this Bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move the amendment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin today by saying that I did appreciate the debate that has taken place in this House, and I know my constituents can support what we heard earlier through the Minister of Education. I thank the minister for saying that he is prepared to strike a task force and to review and study the issues.

Certainly the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View has come forward with something that she and I have talked about for the last four years. I can support on behalf of my constituents that have talked to me the amendment as just presented. I would hope, in fact, that we can see the task force put in place and that we can hear back from them before we deal with this second reading "10 months hence." So it does allow some time and some input.

Within my constituency I have four independent schools, and each of these schools was established to meet a need, to provide for those children in attendance a wide variety of philosophical, denominational, and developmental approaches to education, approaches that they thought were not available in the public system through the Wolf Creek regional school division. All four have over time retained their unique identity as viable educational alternatives. These schools have a history, a very long history of successfully educating children in the constituency so that they are able to enter the mainstream of Alberta society.

4:10

Let me just explain for a moment. Parkview Adventist academy was founded in 1907; it has 180 students. College Heights junior academy was founded in 1909 and has 200 students, and the Lacombe Christian school was founded in 1945 and has 380 students. The Central Alberta Christian high school, the baby, was founded in 1989 and has 100 students. Mr. Speaker, that's 850 students from the Lacombe side of my constituency being educated in private or independent accredited schools. They have been and are and I hope will continue to be a viable and valuable component of the educational community. They have prospered, as have our public schools, and I do have

to state for the record that I am a supporter of the public school system. Some of the students in these private schools are bright, some are average, some are handicapped, and some are ESL, English as a Second Language. However, all of them are there because their parents wanted to ensure that their educational environment supports and confirms their convictions.

I have visited these schools on several occasions, as I have the public schools, and I see that the children attending come from a broad spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds. These schools do not serve only the rich and the bright. I do know that once the task force gets going, many will be able to say that these schools are indeed held fully accountable to the Minister of Education through legislation and regulation. All must participate in the grades 3, 6, and 9 provincially mandated tests and the grade 12 diploma examinations. All submit annual education reports and three-year educational business plans. Each submits annual audited financial statements and is accountable to Alberta Education. Certainly it must be said that they are accountable to their supporters, those people who through tuition fees or donations help them pay their bills. Each has built facilities for these schools all in compliance with the Alberta Education rules and regulations, all paid for by parents, grandparents, and school supporters. Not one Alberta tax dollar was committed to or invested in these facilities.

The money for capital and yearly tuition is coming both from the rich in my community and the poor alike. The finances for capital expenditures represent a tremendous commitment by parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nieces, and nephews. This year, in fact right now, the Lacombe Christian school is building an 8,000 square foot addition for an approximate total cost of \$600,000, which is approximately \$70 per square foot. Central Alberta Christian high school's building is currently five years old, and this 13,600 square foot facility cost approximately \$45 per square foot to build.

I think there's a lesson that can be learned here: cost efficiency perhaps. The cost to build a new public or separate school would cost the Alberta taxpayer somewhere between \$125 and \$150 per square foot. However, Mr. Speaker, in talking to my constituents, for all of this - their independence, their commitment, their self-sufficiency, their cost-effectiveness - they are penalized, penalized for independent, entrepreneurial, private initiatives, which we reward and acknowledge in other enterprises within our economy. For doing well, for educating responsibly and to government standards, and for doing it with less money and less resources, private schools receive 33 percent of the money that would be required if these same students were part and parcel of the public system.

As a government we've endorsed, supported, and are committed to choices in education. We have made it possible to have charter schools, providing yet another alternative within the public system. As a government we know that parents and students alike are better served when given a greater choice of and access to a wide variety of approaches and initiatives.

We have been praised by many educators throughout North America for our policies of choice and equitable access, yet we seem to have blinders on when we consider the educational choice of about 3 percent of Alberta's students, those that attend private schools. Why do we seem unconvinced as to the possibility that these schools might in fact provide yet another means through which we can strengthen our society, another possible choice where children may find a place of learning that is conducive to nurturing and growth? We say that we believe in the strength that

can be achieved by diversity, yet by retaining the current financial restrictions, we close ourselves off to the possibility that privately operated or independent accredited schools might well enhance our society at a lower cost.

Mr. Speaker, not all children are treated equally. ECS: a kindergarten child receives the same funding, public, separate, or private. Severe disability: a child with severe disabilities receives the same funding, public, separate, or independent. Home education: a child on a home education program receives the same funding for supervision, public, separate, or independent. Learning disabled: a child who has been designated as learning disabled may receive the same instructional grant, public, separate, or independent. But the severely normal: the child in a regular 1 to 12 program in an independent school will receive only approximately 33 percent of the funding available to his or her friends in a public or separate school. I have trouble explaining this. The student on a blended home education program spends 50 percent of his or her time in a regular school. This student is funded at a rate of 100 percent, yet the student who spends 100 percent of their time in an independent school is funded at 33 percent. The independent school student on a CTS project with a local expert will receive 33 percent of the funding that his or her public school friend receives for taking the same course at the same time with the same person. Is this fair? Equitable? Are we providing an education package for the common good of all Alberta students? I don't think so.

In the 1997-98 Alberta Education business plan it is stated that the department's mission is "the best education for all Alberta students." If private schools are receiving instructional funding at a level much less than what public schools receive, clearly all Alberta students are not being treated equally.

One other inconsistency that I would like to bring forward and would hope that the task force could look at is technology integration funding. On March 26, 1996, the government announced a grant of \$5 million in the 1995-96 budget year to assist to connect to the Internet. School superintendents and administrators were encouraged to make network access planning and implementation a priority. Accredited independent schools were included. In an announcement dated May 28, 1996, we allocated \$40 million over three years for computer upgrading in Alberta schools. Unfortunately, much to my chagrin and that of some of my constituents, some children have been denied this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, because this technology integration funding was not made available to independent schools. The funding is based on matching dollars from public and separate school jurisdictions only. Why?

A second announcement made on June 24, 1996, identifies funding through lotteries over two years: \$2.5 million in '96-97 and \$2.5 million in '97-98. These funds will further expand and enhance the original technology program. Why, when these funds are provided through lottery dollars, are we precluding some children? Lottery funds, may I remind this Assembly, are intended to benefit all Albertans. If in fact we were to include these students registered in accredited private schools for this funding, the dollar amount would be approximately \$120,000. Many of my constituents have had a great deal of difficulty understanding the rationale behind this decision. Quite frankly, so do I. I do hope it is something we can look at. What justification do we have for denying these children access to either lottery dollars or tax dollars for the purchase of computers? These parents pay education taxes through property taxes, and I'm sure some have even contributed or donated in their own way to the net lottery revenue returned to the province.

4:20

In today's world where we are competing globally, particularly as it relates to technology, I would think that we would want to encourage all young Albertans to be computer literate. What benefits do Albertans receive by placing some of our citizens at a disadvantage in an economy we'll eventually want them to participate in? Computers and related technology continue to be the way of the future. All children in this province need the tools necessary to be prepared. I would hope, hon. minister, that this can be part and parcel of your task force.

My independent school constituents are quite willing to continue to build and maintain their schools, but they want what all parents want: instructional dollars designated for the education of children to follow each child to the school where the instruction takes place.

As a government we have led the way nationally by doing the right thing for our citizenry. Our initiatives and leadership in education endeavours have become a marker for other provinces. Let's continue to progress. Let's put aside our differences and do what is right for the future citizens of this province. Let's support this initiative as identified by the hon. minister, where a task force can review and study the issues and report back to us. Let's not deny these children access to funding for instruction. All students, including those enrolled in independent schools, are our greatest future asset. Let's allow them to learn, graduate, enter the workforce, and contribute to our economy and to this society unencumbered. If children indeed are our tomorrow, then we must prepare them today.

This, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, is not for or against. It's not winners and losers, right or wrong, public and separate versus independent. This is about education, and this is about children.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had hoped to rise to speak this afternoon directly to Bill 209. I've been sitting here patiently listening to the debate up until the point of this hoist amendment. Nonetheless, since this is likely the only opportunity I'll get for at least a year, I'd like to at least address the amendment, if I could, as I must, I realize as well.

The essence of this amendment to Bill 209, if I read it correctly, is to hoist it for a period of approximately "10 months hence." However, 10 months hence basically goes beyond the end of our fiscal calendar year. I'm not sure how the Standing Orders read in that regard, but it's quite possible that if the amendment goes through as it is, although it's well intentioned, what it effectively might do is leave the Bill on the Order Paper, which would effectively kill it come January 1, 1998, in which case a new Bill would have to come forward, and the process would have to start all over again. I would be doing a disservice to my constituents by delaying that discussion for that long a period of time.

I have a number of individuals in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, who are very strong supporters of private schools. As a former school teacher and as a parent and as a legislator and as a Christian Sunday school teacher I'm very supportive of the objectives and even the outcomes that we see arriving out of the education of our private school students. I gave an undertaking to my constituents that I would pursue this issue of fairer funding on their behalf, but the amendment really wouldn't allow me to do that for about a year's time. I think that's very unfortunate,

because this issue has been around for a very long time. I think you'll find that these schools have been around for a few decades now, and the government has surely had ample time to address this issue. I believe that there are studies and reports, facts and figures available at the government's discretion should they choose to review them and apply them now in terms of furthering the debate.

I'm not opposed to a task force, and I'm not opposed to receiving more information either. That's not the point I'm trying to make. What I am saying is that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View did have, as I understand it, a motion that she had put forward in this regard last year or during the last session at least, and presumably that would have caused government to take a look at the issue then. I believe that by hoisting the amendment, there's a danger of the government divulging that they didn't pay it due attention then, and we have a Bill before us which I think merits that consideration now.

It's an issue where parents and children not only in my constituency but I'm sure in many, many other constituencies have been sitting back, being very patient, and waiting for the debate to happen. Now here we are, halfway through the debate, so to speak, and suddenly we have before us an amendment that tells us that it's not going to be debated any further. I don't believe that that's fair to the people who are out there waiting for some sort of resolution. Again, I'm not opposed to the fact that the government needs a little more time to think some of this through, but there would be time for them to do that in any event. I would even argue that there has been time. I think the government must by now know why it is, for example, that people are electing to send their children to these private schools.

In particular I want to zero in on Christian schools because that's where I think almost 100 percent of the lobby in my constituency is coming from. I realize there are other examples of private schools, but I'm speaking for myself in Edmonton-Mill Creek. Parents are electing to send their children to these Christian schools I think because they feel there's something of a spiritual value that they are receiving in that private Christian school environment that is otherwise sadly absent in our full public system.

I have the benefit, Mr. Speaker, of having one child in the Catholic school system and one in the public school system. I'm very impressed with what's going on in both systems, but in terms of the spirituality there's no question that my daughter is receiving something that is an extension of my family values and my Sundays with them in terms of the Christian aspect. I think that is what is being asked for here, that parents are electing to send their students to these private schools because there's no other place where they get that contact with spirituality to the degree they do there.

We've seen major changes happen in our school system which maybe this task force will address. We've seen classes or courses that are of a religious nature being removed. We've even seen the Lord's Prayer removed in many cases. I realize it still exists in some form somewhere else. I think that it's unfortunate that our school system today doesn't even have a spiritual message. I wouldn't even call necessarily for the Lord's Prayer to be given, but I think it's totally appropriate for our schools to at least have a spiritual message. For those that wish to make it the Lord's Prayer, let it be so. For those that wish to do a more generic prayer, such as we do in this Assembly every day, I see nothing wrong with that. I think there is a fundamental value to that argument that can be easily supported.

If this amendment goes through and the task force does get a chance to go out and do its thing, then please address some of those very basic issues, because that's what the people out there are telling me they want, and I'm assuming they're probably telling you pretty much the same thing. I realize that the task force will not have an easy job of looking into all of these major issues, but I can't strongly enough endorse that I am a full supporter of the public school process and the public school system. I believe in that with all my heart, Mr. Speaker. But I don't believe in penalizing those who are basically pursuing the same thing through an alternative method, where there might be some minor discrepancy because of the choice they have made in terms of the religion they choose to pursue.

4:30

The task force knows that charter schools, home schooling, private schooling, public, Catholic, Protestant, whatever you want – those are all choices. Those are all choices that we as parents make on behalf of our children, and I would hope that the task force will address that. I don't believe that these private schools are causing any destruction or demise to the public education system unless we are starting to take direct education dollars out of the Education portfolio to do that. Then that argument might have some merit. I believe that the answer is for the government to take a look at where that private school funding might come from, and in so doing, perhaps they could take a look at moneys that might come from the general revenue fund to help augment the funding for private schools. Maybe there are moneys available somewhere in the lotteries portfolio, which I realize might pose some ethical and moral dilemmas in terms of the recipients. I understand that. I've been through that for nine years, and I know that scene probably better than most members here. But the fact is that there are pools of money available elsewhere that they could look at.

Again, I'm a very strong supporter of and I understand the public school system. I was in it for many, many years, and I still support it with my tax dollars. The tax dollars are collected from everybody rather evenly. But are they distributed back evenly in terms of education? That's the fundamental question that this task force, which was alluded to with regard to the proposer of the amendment before us – that's one of the issues that they have to decide. So on behalf of my constituents who have asked me as their representative to speak out on their behalf, I am supportive of the discussion that we're having to explore fairer funding for private schools. I'm not sure where it's going to go, and I can't give you a magic number of how much it should be. All I know is that I am persuaded and I understand that the amount of money that is being received by the private schools is insufficient.

As I look at the costs, which are all tax supported here, for the education system, I understand that it basically costs us \$5,500 to educate a child in this province. Then I see only \$1,800 going to the Christian schools, the private schools, and I say that there is some inequity there, some imbalance there that needs to be addressed. It just seems unfair that parents like myself, who pay the same amount in taxes toward education, aren't receiving the same amount back because of religion.

Historically it seems that religion should have been our greatest unifier, yet it stands as our greatest divider. I think it's shameful that in a country like Canada, that touts the freedoms that it touts and enshrines them in legislation in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and elsewhere, we would allow religion to become again a divider, when people have come to this country because

they came from a place where religion divided them, and here we are allowing more division to occur. There must be an answer to this, and I'm disappointed that the government hasn't yet found the handle to this one.

So the task force will undoubtedly go out there. In the process the Bill will die on the Order Paper on December 31. I'm assuming that we probably won't have a fall session – at least that's what the buzz is – and that would mean, then, that this whole process starts over again. Some hon. member has to come forward with another motion or craft another Bill, and maybe – who knows? – it'll be better than what we have here. But I don't want to see that precious time squandered, which is unfortunately, I think, going to wind up being the case. If they're able to come forward with something better, a new, improved model that will address this on behalf of those constituents that we represent who are in favour of it, then so be it. I'll stand back and applaud the government for that. But if this is simply an attempt to get off the hot seat because it's a controversial issue, then I cannot support that amendment, and I think my constituents would be very disappointed if I did.

There are other issues that I want to address which I'm not clear on yet, and that is with regard to whether or not these private schools are in fact open and accountable in terms of their record keeping and their bookkeeping. I'm given to understand that some are and that others may not be. I know that's an issue that has to be addressed, and I hope the task force will do that definitively and come out very clearly explaining that.

Secondly is the issue: do these private Christian schools have to engage only fully certified, Alberta-certified teachers? I understand in some cases that is not the situation, or perhaps it's the principal who doesn't have to be. I'm not sure. They all seem to be just a little bit different, in my mind at least.

The third issue that I hope the task force will address in the interest of public education – a small “p” for public there – is accessibility and admission. Are the private Christian schools open and accessible to all, and do they admit everybody, given that they would subscribe to the curriculum and the spiritual part of the curriculum that is being offered there? Are they admitting all students? The amendment, if it succeeds, will I hope allow that task force to address that.

The final issue there is with regard specifically to the curriculum. Are these private Christian schools adhering strictly to the curriculum and adding a dose of spirituality, and if so, then what's wrong with that? Nothing, I would submit, provided that the basic curriculum is being met in the first instance.

Again, I can't stress strongly enough my support for public education but also my willingness to pursue fairer funding for the private Christian schools, in particular, on behalf of my constituents.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing the outcome of this debate. Since the government is bringing it in, I realize it'll probably succeed. So I'm hoping and I'm anticipating that this task force that they're asking for will address those issues plus all the other issues that have been addressed and come forward finally with a position that resolves this matter for the thousands of parents and educators and children who are out there. I believe that the overriding issue that is more fundamental and more important than anything else isn't really the issue of public education versus private education; it's education of the child. That has to be our primary focus. That's where this debate should centre, and that's where I hope the minister will direct the forthcoming task force.

Thank you.

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on this amendment brought forth by my colleague. My intentions today were to rise to speak enthusiastically to Bill 209. As many of you know, my constituency is dotted with private schools, and many of my constituents are in favour of passing 209. I, too, strongly support the Bill itself, even though I feel it falls a bit short of what it should be, which is full equitable funding.

This was a major campaign issue in my constituency during both the nomination and election processes. In the situation before me now, however, I must make a decision on this amendment as to what I feel will be in the best interests of my constituents. Not knowing the outcome of the debate on Bill 209 or the vote and with the knowledge that support of this amendment will certainly bring this issue to the public stage, I've decided to speak in favour of the amendment, because I am confident that those Albertans who feel that their freedom of choice should not be restricted by decreased funding will make a strong case for equitable funding and that they will find they will be given a fair and considered understanding on this issue by fellow Albertans and by this government.

Private schools have many different focuses. There are private schools for the learning disabled and emotionally disturbed. There are schools for different religious and philosophical approaches. Some schools are for the intellectually gifted or the musically and artistically endowed. Other schools focus on language or ethnic communities. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, private schools in our province are as diverse as their students. I believe that this motion, put forward by the Member for Medicine Hat, will raise awareness of the whole education system and the discrepancies that exist within the system as a whole and in our society.

There's a perception that private schools cater to the children of the elite or wealthy members of our society. It's thought that only rich kids go to private schools. Nothing could be further from the truth. Most of the families in my area who send their children to private schools are average Albertans, many of whom work hard on their farms and in their businesses trying to provide the best education they can for their children. This means sending them to private schools where they can receive the specialized instruction they want.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency that specialized instruction is often associated with a particular faith or religious outlook not addressed by the public system. These students are not society's elites. Unfortunately their parents end up paying for education twice: once in property taxes, once again in tuition for schools. Parents make financial sacrifices because they think it's important. The majority of private schools do not charge full tuition to those families in need. In fact, depending on the circumstances, they may not charge tuition at all. Instead, other families end up picking up the cost. According to studies done in the '80s in the Genesis education report of 1985, about 60 percent of the families whose children attended private schools make less than \$30,000 a year.

Another issue relating to private schools that I'd like to discuss is the actual savings that are realized by having these students attend school outside the public system. We currently fund private schools at the instructional rate of \$1,815 per student, which is less than half the public rate. However, we do not have

to fund the cost to transport the private students to and from school, which in urban areas costs \$345 per student per year. We do not have to fund private schools for operation and maintenance costs, which is \$413 per student per year. No capital funding goes to private schools either. In terms of yearly expenditure, Mr. Speaker, in 1995-96 the total amount spent on private schools was nearly \$35 million. Conversely, the total amount spent on public and separate school support was roughly \$1.3 billion. Having to allocate another \$14 million to meet the 75 percent called for in this Bill I felt was worth it and deserved by Alberta students.

I'm also told by opponents of the Bill that parents should have the right to choose private schooling, but if they do choose to do that, they must give up equitable funding. I ask why. We allow choice in a number of other areas of education. Besides the choice of the public system, one can choose the separate, or Catholic, school system, which is fully funded. One can choose the charter school system, which is fully funded. Hutterites also have the choice of their own schooling, again, fully funded with per student instructional funds. I would like to point that out to my colleague.

I would also like to point out that I fully support all of those choices, including the public system. We seem to continue to discriminate, though, against private schools that include religious studies in addition to the approved Alberta curriculum. Again I ask why. I just read on the walls of this very building this morning a copy of the Alberta Bill of Rights. Near the top of that list was freedom of religion, yet I'm told that a private school cannot become a charter school because religious studies are taught.

Mr. Speaker, there seems to be an inconsistency here. Something is wrong with this picture. It certainly seems out of focus to me. That is why I support this motion, because there needs to be a greater understanding amongst all members of the public. We all need to be better informed in Alberta on the many unfounded perceptions that exist, such as that equitable instructional funding for private schools jeopardizes the whole public school system. The fact is that the current system jeopardizes one's freedom of choice. Bill 209 is a step towards fixing that situation, not a big enough step, in my opinion, but a step nonetheless. That's why I support this amendment. I also support the amendment because I feel this issue has to be addressed once and for all with full public consultation, because it is not going to go away.

Last Friday I attended a graduation ceremony at Carstairs community centre for 23 students from the Olds Koinonia Christian school. I was invited to address the gathering, and as I looked across the crowd of parents and their friends, I saw Albertans no different than those anywhere in the province that I've traveled, no richer, no poorer, just hardworking, taxpaying Albertans. As I looked at the grads and their classmates, I saw typical Alberta kids, our kids, kids that simply want the same choice as other students have in separate schools and charter schools and any other schools in this province that receive equitable instructional funding. These are students, our students, who do not understand why they should be singled out simply on the basis of choosing a Christian-based school, and quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't understand it either.

The commitment made by the hon. Minister of Education to form a task force and to have public consultation on this matter is appreciated. I trust it will be a fair and open exercise, and I look forward to participating in any way I can which will be in the best

interests of my constituents and all the students in this province.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that I am very disappointed that this amendment came forward today. I think it is nothing more than a delay tactic by a government that is afraid to stand up and be counted, whether it be one way or another.

Do you know what? Thousands of people across this province today heard on the radio that this decision was going to be made here today. Then they'll leave and say that they decided not to decide. I think that flies in the face of democracy, and it disappoints me.

AN HON. MEMBER: How would you vote on the Bill?

MRS. SOETAERT: I was in fact, Mr. Speaker, continuing on the amendment but am not afraid to say that I was voting against Bill 209 for various reasons that I will get to. I have said it in our local paper, unlike the members for St. Albert and Redwater, who were asked, who danced around it. However, I was not afraid to take a stand. So I'm not afraid to stand and debate that issue, but I'm forced right now to speak to the amendment.

Now, I happen to know that if the minister wanted to set up a task force – he knew this was coming. I would venture to say that the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View does her homework. She has enough integrity to represent her constituents, to bring that forward. The minister knew it was coming. He saw it coming, so if he wanted a task force, he certainly could vote for or against this and set up the task force regardless. It is nothing but a ploy to take the heat off this government, that's afraid to stand on different issues. I guess to them it's just a game that they've found a way out of. The word "chicken" comes to mind, but I don't like to refer to anyone as chickens. But if you don't want to stand up and be counted, that's a pity. [interjections]

**Speaker's Ruling
Private Members' Public Bills
Decorum**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Two things while the Chair is on his feet. I would observe that we have this afternoon private members' public Bills, not government Bills. So that should be clear to all hon. members.

Secondly, characterizing one another in the Assembly, whether you call them magpies, sheep, or chickens, is really inappropriate. It's hard to contain a debate and be civil with one another if we're characterizing one another as being other than hon. members.

Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do apologize for those comments.

I want to say, though, that this amendment has been moved by the government Whip. Is that a separate issue in here, or is it not? He's a private member? Can I ask the Speaker that?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All hon. members will be reminded that a similar issue came up sometime ago in the last session, when there was some disagreement with regard to the Government House Leader. It was made clear by the Speaker of the day and

the Speaker of that term that this is private members' public Bills, so there isn't such a thing as government Whips, opposition Whips. It's open to all. I think we must respect that or we'll lose this opportunity. If it's going to be called government time, then that's what will happen. But it is not. It's private members' public Bills.

Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarification.

4:50

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Then I would urge all members of this Assembly not to support this hoist. I realize it's been brought forward by a private member, and I respect the right to do that. I have concerns over the Bill. I respect the fact that people can choose what type of education they want to send their children to, but a government's role is to properly fund public education, and that is where this government has fallen short. So the whole issue of funding for private I cannot support, particularly considering the fact that public education is underfunded.

That aside, to the amendment. I would urge all members – we're all regular members of the Assembly on private members' day – to stand up and be counted by voting against this hoist. We can then vote on the Bill so that people in this province know where each of us stands on the issue. I believe that our constituents deserve that much. I know the letters and phone calls on both sides of the issue that have come into my office. I know how I value public education, and I know I'm not afraid to speak out and say how I stand on it. That's why people elect you: to represent and to speak up for them. By this hoist you're denying your constituents your opportunity to say where you stand.

I would venture to say that that is a delay tactic, a way to take the heat off an issue, a way to avoid different members standing up opposed to each other in this House. Yet this, a private member's Bill, is a free vote, I would think. So I would urge all members: if you're not afraid of that, then stand up and be counted. Vote against this hoist, get on with Bill 209, and take a stand for the people that elected you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on the amendment, unfortunately. I would have chosen and preferred to speak on the Bill itself. However, I do see some merits as to why this amendment has been brought forward, and I do want to raise a few points today.

This Bill, as it has been brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, has been an issue that she has raised a number of times through motions and other Bills, and I'm glad that it has been brought to the forefront where we will be debating some points and merits of it.

At the outset I would like to make a few clarifications. I am a proud parent of two children, one in high school, one in elementary school. One is finishing grade 12, and the other one is finishing grade 5. Both of my children attend the public school system, and I'm happy with the education that they receive. I'm happy with the overall achievement and accomplishments they've had in the public school system. They have interacted with positive peer groups. They have participated in numerous

academic and extracurricular activities, in recreational activities, public speaking, and there is nothing that I can say about the education that my children have received except positive. However, I am an MLA representing diverse constituents, and I have to be cognizant of what the needs of my constituents are. There are a few important points that we need to be debating and considering, important enough for a task force to look into.

As a province we promote the Alberta advantage, which is based on Albertans who are responsible citizens, who pay their due share in public taxes, who live within the laws of this land, and who do make choices and decisions about where they would like to send their children. In order to make this point, I would like to read a few points that have been raised by someone who wrote a letter to me. The lady writes to me indicating:

We lived in Claresholm until 1990. Our eldest child went through that (public) school system with flying colors. He placed 55th in Canada in the Fermat Math Competition from Waterloo, and was an Honor Student. Upon graduation he was awarded the Rutherford, U. of C. Matriculation and Canada Scholarships. In 1993 he graduated with a B. Comm. degree from the U. of C.

The person goes on to say further:

Our youngest child was of a different nature. In grade eight we could see problems looming with her and her peer group. We felt drastic measures had to be taken, also in the last year we had seen two close friends go through a teen-age pregnancy and another family's daughter running off to the streets and becoming a hooker.

We chose to move to Three Hills where our daughter attended Prairie High School . . . We still had some rocky times up there but we are thankful that following her time at Prairie and a year at Capenwray Bible School in Sweden, she eventually settled down.

The lady goes on to say that "at 21 years of age, the youngest in her class," her child "made the Dean's List her first quarter."

Mr. Speaker, parents do have to make choices between public and sometimes independent or private schools. I have three such private schools in my riding. I have the Joshua elementary school, which caters to a number of physically and mentally challenged individuals. I also have the Heritage Christian school, which is based on some values that they'd like to impart to their children. I also happen to have Rundle College, which is a private school, in my riding, which provides education with a lower student/teacher ratio. Choices have been made, and they are presently paying fees for the decisions that they have made. I believe that parents can make the choice. However, the child's education component, the instructional funding part, should follow the child regardless of what school the child goes to.

Let me raise another point with the public school system that I'm concerned about in my riding. We have a high ratio of students who need English as a Second Language. Mr. Speaker, it is very sad to say that 70 percent of ESL students do not finish high school. Now, if the parents of these children choose to put the child in a special school that will meet the needs of ESL students, why should the instructional funding not follow the child? I believe we do have responsibilities as a province to provide for the infrastructure and supports for public systems. However, the instructional funding has to follow the child.

I believe that the funding for private schools, if you can call it that, will have to come from the general revenue fund. It should not come at the expense of the public education system. We should have an assurance that the public education system will be preserved. I hope that this task force will go around the province, study the issue, and come back with some good recommendations that will be fair to every child in this province. We as a govern-

ment have gone through some major, major adjustments in how our tax dollars are reallocated to the education system, and some areas have had to give up certain funding so that there is equitable funding throughout the province. That was based on the premise that a child in Alberta, regardless of where the child lives, will have equitable funding made accessible or available to that child. For the very same reasons I believe that instructional funding has to follow a child. I hope that this task force will have that opportunity and we will have an opportunity in the next session to resolve this matter once and for all.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat with a recommendation that we support this amendment, hoping that we will have some good results in the best interests of our children.

Thank you.

5:00

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against this amendment, and I'm sorry that I even have to do this. I mean, here it is, the right of this private member, the private member that brings forward a Bill in the proper manner, brings it to this point, and then what does the government with the Whips fully on do? Clam up.

Speaker's Ruling Private Members' Public Bills

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I know it's improper to decide whether or not you've been here or were not here. The Chair has already spoken quite clearly on this matter. We are in private members' public Bills, and a member here is exactly that. The hon. Member for Medicine Hat is not acting today as government Whip, nor is the Whip that may be with the opposition parties. We're talking about a private member's public Bill. If you wish to speak against that, fine, but do not characterize it as a government amendment. It's not a government day.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir, for the admonishment.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: There's something about the right to vote in this place that has some relevance. Now, when we do have to vote on this issue, I wonder what the government side is going to do? Is there going to be a few that'll say: "Yeah, this is wrong. We should talk about this."? Now, what is it that you're afraid of? Afraid of standing up and being counted? Gee whiz, I kind of thought that was what this place was about. You already have the Premier on record and the minister on record of his opinion on the Bill, and rightly so. And now a task force? Three years ago in this House, four years ago in this House, the former Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Laurence Decore . . . [interjections] There's a terrible noise over there, some little round beach ball at the end, sir.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's late in the afternoon. Perhaps we've sat here too long, but I wonder if we could bring some civility back to the Chamber. We've already had admonishments from the Chair about reflecting on people as to whether or not they may be one kind of animal or another. I

don't think we need anything further in that regard reflecting on the characters of individuals. If we could just stick to the amendment on Bill 209, that would be helpful to all.

For those hon. members who are in the front row, we would hope that they would be able to contain their exuberance for the next few minutes.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: When a task force was proposed in this House four years ago, a task force on education funding – look it up; it's been there – you stood in line and said: no, no, no; we won't do that. Now we have a small element of it. Now you don't want to even talk about it? You want to put it off to some other time? I say this is balderdash. I mean, what is it about public education versus private education that you don't understand? You don't understand how many students are in there? The minister has told you precisely the amount of money that is involved in it. What is it you don't understand? I can't understand what you're missing. The facts are that there is something to understand here: you don't want to put anybody off. Well, I'm sorry. That's government. You're going to have to do it sooner or later.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

DR. WEST: Would the hon. member entertain a question in debate?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, the hon. minister wants to know if you will entertain a question. You just have to give yes or no.

MR. WHITE: No. He has silly questions anyway.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: What was asked in this task force was all elements of funding for education. That's exactly where it should have come. Now, look; I can't understand why there's a desire to send this thing off for more information. I'll tell you what. [interjection] I'm sorry, sir? Speaking on the amendment . . . I'm getting catcalls asking what I believe on the Bill, when I can't speak to the Bill.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall just said in debate here that he would hope that this funding comes separate from public education funding. Well, we know that's not the case. There's one pot that the Minister of Education administers. That's one pot. Every time you increase funding in one area and you don't increase funding for the entire department, something has to give here. Now, there is a possibility that that may not happen, but I haven't heard anything of that here ever, and there is a great deal of funding, some \$14 million to \$18 million, being spent in that area right now, which is, in my view, reasonable. But to suspend debate on this matter and to not deal with the issue is just simply a dodge. It doesn't deal with the matter at all, and, sir, it really is not that kind of thing that should be dealt with in this House. The private member has the right to hear what the other members believe on the private member's Bill.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before the Chair recognizes Calgary-Currie, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

MRS. SOETAERT: They didn't know it was me, or they might not have given unanimous consent, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. Thank you to the members.

It's my pleasure to introduce two guests from the Netherlands, Jac Van der Maarel and his wife, Cornelia Van der Maarel. They're here in the gallery with two very active people in St. Albert, Joan and Gerry Tersmette, very involved in their church and many other groups in St. Albert. I would ask all four of them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Bill 209 School Amendment Act, 1997 (continued)

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that our time is rapidly running out, so I want to go on record as supporting the hoist motion. I want to do that because I believe there is a great need to have some clarification about the funding of education, both public and independent. That has certainly been the issue that has come through in my constituency. The fear that we are taking money from public education and undermining the system should not be confused with our need to fund the educational component of our students' education irrespective of where they are studying in the province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw to the attention of this Assembly that the single most effective way to educate your children is to have parents committed to that education. That is a cost-effective nonstarter. The child of any parent who supports their child's education will do well wherever they are. I find it very, very difficult to think that when parents make that choice using an independent school model, they are penalized because they are not able to access the education dollars.

I'd like to bring to the attention of this House that at the postsecondary level we support private funding for education in our technical colleges. We have career programs. We fund student loans for students who make choices in private school settings. I find it very interesting that we are not able to have the same philosophy at the basic ed level.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a) we now have five minutes for the original mover of the Bill and would invite the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View to conclude debate.

5:10

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues. I've always known that this issue was larger than my private member's Bill. I've always known that my

chances of having my private member's Bill passed were remote, slim, and none, but I've always also known that this issue has to be discussed. It might not be comfortable as an MLA to raise this issue from my constituency point of view. I have a lot of people in my constituency supporting what I'm trying to do, and I have a lot of people angry because they believe that in some way I've let down the side of public education or that I no longer support public education or in fact, more absurd, that I'm going to take money from public education if this Bill were to pass.

I appreciate very much what the minister has offered to do in setting up a task force. I believe that this task force has the potential, Mr. Minister, to do that which we probably should have done a while ago but to do it well if we set the right parameters and we do it with meaning and with honesty and we are not afraid to look at what the issue is, which is nothing more and nothing less than the education of all children in Alberta who all have the same rights.

We can no longer pretend that this isn't an issue. We can no longer pretend that we don't have anomalies throughout our system. We can't pretend that it's okay to fund a Catholic system but that it's not okay to fund a Protestant system. We can't pretend that it's okay to have charter schools that can by their very nature be exclusionary and then blame the private schools for doing the same types of things. All of that has to be addressed in this task force. I hope the people who have supported me, the 852 letters that I have received from my own constituents, don't feel like I'm letting them down when I say that I will accept the hoist. I will because I believe that in the end this is a big issue. It needs a full-blown debate throughout Alberta. I trust that the minister will make sure that happens.

MRS. SOETAERT: Why did you bring the Bill forward, Carol?

MS HALEY: I brought the Bill forward, hon. member, because my constituents asked me to, and that is all, hon. member.

I would like to thank the House for the debate, for the opportunity to do this as a private member. I really am grateful, and I would call the question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question has been called. We have before us, then, a hoist amendment. Having heard the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, all those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The amendment is carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:13 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Haley	Nicol
Boutilier	Havelock	O'Neill
Broda	Herard	Paszkowski
Burgener	Hlady	Pham
Cao	Johnson	Renner
Cardinal	Jonson	Severtson
Clegg	Klapstein	Shariff
Coutts	Kryczka	Smith
Day	Laing	Stevens
Doerksen	Langevin	Strang
Ducharme	Magnus	Tarchuk
Dunford	Mar	Thurber
Fischer	Marz	West
Forsyth	McClellan	Woloshyn
Friedel	McFarland	Yankowsky
Gordon	Melchin	Zwozdesky
Graham		

Against the motion:

Dickson	Mitchell	Sapers
Leibovici	Olsen	Soetaert
MacDonald	Pannu	White
Massey	Paul	

Totals: For - 49 Against - 11

[Motion carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]