

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, December 10, 1997** 1:30 p.m.
Date: 97/12/10
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: O Lord, we give thanks as legislators for the rich diversity of our history and our culture.

We welcome the many challenges of the present.

We dedicate ourselves to both the present and the future as we join in the service of Alberta and Canada.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the Assembly I am very pleased to introduce visitors from the Riverview middle school in Devon. There are 59 visitors, 29 of whom are in the members' gallery and 30 in the public gallery.

AN HON. MEMBER: That comes later.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Oh, sorry. Mr. Speaker? Okay. Thank you for your indulgence then. I am anxious to introduce these visitors because I don't often get an opportunity to do so.

MR. AMERY: This is a special session anyway.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Well, I'm making this session more special than it probably ought to be.

They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Janet Petesky and Mr. Vince May, also parents and helpers Mrs. Deidre Miller, Mrs. Elaine Fox, and Mr. Kirk Mosdell, as well as Ms Danielle L'Hirondelle. Please extend to them the warm welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I wish to present two petitions today on behalf of the constituents of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. The first petition is signed by 25 members of the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce, and the second is signed by 15 members of the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce. Both petitions urge the government of Alberta not to support the Canada pension plan amendments set to go through on January 1, 1998, and instead recommend to the federal government that they introduce "a privately managed, Mandatory Retirement Savings Plan."

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I have two petitions I would like to present to the Assembly. The first is signed by Albertans who are urging the government "to increase the amount of the monthly payment to recipients of Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped," as these payments have not been increased for several years.

The second petition is urging the government of Alberta "to hold an Independent Public Inquiry into the complete operations of the Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta."

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege this afternoon to table three petitions: one from the Altadore Elementary School Council, one from the Alternative High School Council, and one from parents of the Earl Grey School Council. These petitioners, numbering about 52, have asked that the Calgary education declaration be considered as part of our unity discussions in this special session.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there are some four or five petitions that have been introduced, so I'm asking that they now be read and received. Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to freeze per pupil grants of public money to private schools at \$1,815 per funded student.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to end any and all payments of public money to private schools from revenues collected by or for the Province of Alberta.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to convert the Holy Cross Hospital into a facility to house the Homeless in Calgary.

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.

We, the undersigned citizens of the province of Alberta, petition the legislative assembly to urge the Government to provide for a plebiscite vote, for the residents of Region 4 as outlined [in] the Provincial Regional Health Authorities Act, in conjunction with the up coming provincial election on the following question: Should the Calgary General Hospital, Bow Valley Site, remain open as a full service acute care hospital?

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to . . . historically designate the "Lang House", in the Cliff Bungalow - Mission Community . . . in the City of Calgary . . . as notable, unique and rare.

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

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you. I request that the petition I presented yesterday containing over 8,000 signatures now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned . . . residents of the province of Alberta, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government of Alberta to introduce legislation "to make it an illegal act for a person or persons to ride in the rear of any pick-up truck, or other open bed vehicle without secured seats and approved seatbelts." This legislation to apply and be enforced on any public road in the province of Alberta.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now request that the two petitions I presented on Monday be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to freeze per pupil grants of public money to private schools at \$1,815 per funded student.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to end any and all payments of public money to private schools from revenues collected by or for the Province of Alberta.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd ask that the two petitions I presented yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to freeze per pupil grants of public money to private schools at \$1,815 per funded student.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to end any and all payments of public money to private schools from revenues collected by or for the Province of Alberta.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week I tabled two petitions with regard to private school funding. I would ask that they now be read and received by the House.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to freeze per pupil grants of public money to private schools at \$1,815 per funded student.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to end any and all payments of public money to private schools from revenues collected by or for the Province of Alberta.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petitions I presented on Monday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to freeze per pupil grants of public money to private schools at \$1,815 per funded student.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to end any and all payments of public money to private schools from revenues collected by or for the Province of Alberta.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petition which I tabled in this Assembly yesterday regarding equitable access to long-term care now be read and received and the petition which I had tabled yesterday

requesting the addition of the Truquant BR RIA diagnostic blood test for early detection of breast cancer recurrence also be now 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.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to add the Truquant BR RIA diagnostic blood test for early detection of breast cancer recurrence to the schedule of medical benefits under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan.

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

1:40

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request the petitions I presented yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to freeze per pupil grants of public money to private schools at \$1,815 per funded student.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to end any and all payments of public money to private schools from revenues collected by or for the Province of Alberta.

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

MR. GIBBONS: I request through you that the two petitions I presented on Monday, December 8 be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to freeze per pupil grants of public money to private schools at \$1,815 per funded student.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to end any and all payments of public money to private schools from revenues collected by or for the province of Alberta.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering, with your permission, if I could ask that the petitions that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar presented the other day be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to freeze per pupil grants of public money to private schools at \$1,815 per funded student.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to end any and all payments of public money to private schools from revenues collected by or for the Province of Alberta.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first tabling is the constituents' responses to the unity brochure.

The second tabling is a comprehensive report on our recent trade mission to Japan, China, and Hong Kong, as a matter of fact in October of this year. I would draw members' attention to comments on pages 2 and 3 of the report from the businesses who accompanied us, clearly demonstrating the value they see in our continuing support for them in developing the Alberta advantage abroad.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table upwards of 300 documents that I have received in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung in response to the questionnaire and then just submissions that people made directly to me on the unity debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling today a number of reports in response to the Auditor General's request for continued timely disclosure. Most of these reports were made public prior to September 30. They would include volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the '96-97 public accounts, the first and second quarter reports for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the annual report for the Alberta Securities Commission, the 58th annual report of the Alberta Treasury Branches, the first and second quarter financial reports for the province of Alberta for '97, the government's response to the Auditor General's recommendations for '96-97, and the 1997 annual reports for the ministries of advanced ed, agriculture, Community Development, Economic Development and Tourism, Education, Energy, Environmental Protection, Executive Council, Family and Social Services, the department formerly known as FIGA, Health, Justice, Labour, Municipal Affairs, public works, science and research, Transportation and Utilities, and Treasury.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With pleasure today I would like to table four reports. The first two are reports and documentation from the province of British Columbia. The first is the response of that government to the Gove inquiry, which was the death of a child in that province, an extremely extensive review and report. The second is the same province's model for the management of risk management in child protection. The third is an analysis conducted by the Official Opposition on Alberta's approach to reforming child welfare published in June of 1997, and the fourth is an addendum to that report, a chronology of recommendations and issues raised by Children's Advocates in Alberta for the last five years.

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table four copies of the following reports: the Alberta Labour Relations Board 1996-97 annual report, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act 1996-97 annual report, and the Workers' Compensation Board 1996 report on objectives.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file a number of documents today, all in reference to International Human Rights Day. All members would be aware that on December 10, 1948, the universal declaration of human rights was signed. Subsequent to that, this is the day when many mark this important occasion. This morning in Edmonton there were celebrations, and at that time there was an announcement of Edmonton hosting a major international human rights conference in 1998. I wish to table that document.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would table the news release on Alberta's commitment to human rights.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, later this afternoon there will be a celebration in Calgary. The presentation of the 1997 Alberta human rights award will be made to the Calgary Police Service's cultural resources unit. I am tabling a letter to Sergeant Lanny Fritz, who is in charge of that unit. I am sure the Member for Calgary-Cross is very proud of this moment. Certainly in that letter congratulating them, if I might be allowed, we have said that this unit is

an inspiration for all Albertans and a part of what makes Alberta such a wonderful place to live. Thank you for your contribution to human rights in Alberta.

I have also written a letter, which I am tabling, to Chief Silverberg of the Calgary police to recognize that accomplishment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three documents to table today. The first one is the Edmonton Social Planning Council's Poverty Trends in Edmonton: The Race to the Bottom Heats Up.

The second one is the report card Campaign 2000. There are now 500,000 more poor children.

The third one is highlights from the Canadian Council on Social Development that was released yesterday addressing children and poverty.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to table the annual report of the Children's Advocate pursuant to section (3.1) of the Alberta Child Welfare Act.

I am pleased to table six copies of the annual reports of the Children's Advocate for '95-96 and '96-97.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table four copies of a letter of December 2 that was sent to myself by Brenda Jones, who is the chair of the Beaverlodge Elementary School Council. It also includes a document that contains 17 signatures supporting the Calgary education declaration and requesting that this document be brought forward at this sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To supplement my presentation on unity yesterday, I indicated I had received some letters from my school communities, and I would like to just

file them now in addition to the tabling I made of the petitions that were sent in answer to the unity question. The letters are from Sunalta school, Western Canada high, Alex Ferguson, Elbow Park, Central Memorial, Bishop Pinkham, Earl Grey, and Janet Johnstone schools. They speak to the issue of education as an important component of our unity discussions and what makes Canada strong.

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

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table with the Legislative Assembly six copies of a December 1997 update on child welfare. This fact sheet provides an update on the status of child welfare and outlines the changes being made to ensure that the best possible program moves to the community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the Alberta Teachers' Association's 1996 annual report.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Calgary-Glenmore I'm pleased to table the results of the response of the unity questionnaires from the Calgary-Glenmore constituency. Of the 436 constituents who responded to the questionnaire, some 85.6 percent generally concurred with the principles embodied in the elements of the Calgary framework.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like today to table remarks and questionnaires from 255 hardworking constituents from the constituency of Dunvegan on the unity question. I forgot yesterday to do that, so I'd like to do it today.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table today over 600 questionnaires from the constituents of Calgary-West, who in total support the resolution 92 percent.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is the Calgary education declaration from Western Canada high school. The signatories are Alex Davidson, ATA school council rep; Fred Ring, principal; Bev MacDonald, chair of the school council.

The second tabling I have is a wonderful analysis by Judith Sherin, principal of Janet Johnstone school in Calgary, where she assesses the Calgary board review team process and concludes by asking whether or not there exists the political will to fairly educate all of Alberta's children.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings to make. The first one is the submission that I made on behalf of our caucus to the Private Schools Funding Task Force in which

we take the unequivocal position that the government of Alberta "reverse its present policy and practice of funding private schools" and further urge it

to put in place a schedule and formula which would steadily reduce public funding of private schools until, after a period of time, no funding would be [available] for private schools, either "accredited" or "registered".

The second submission, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, if I could, is a copy of a letter that was sent by the president of the school council of one of the large high schools in my constituency. The letter was sent to the Minister of Education. I was sent a copy of it. The letter wishes to make it very clear that Strathcona composite high school, which has more than 1,400 students attending, "and their School Council, oppose Bill 209 and the funding of private education with public funds."

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. First, it gives me great pleasure to table 288 submissions from constituents within Edmonton-Meadowlark. Of those 288, overall 69.8 percent agreed fully with the declaration, 13.5 percent had some reservations, for a total of 83.3 percent.

I'd also like to table this afternoon the plan of action that the Royal Canadian Legion has put forward with regards to Canadian unity, and this is an across Canada initiative that will be undertaken.

My third tabling, which I just received, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of Ian McClelland, who is the Edmonton Southwest member, and he would like to have his unity report and the results of his current unity survey tabled as well.

Thank you, very much.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have four tablings. The first is a document entitled Why We Are Fighting Two-tier, For-profit Health Care. This document was authored by Phyllis Matousek, the chairperson of the Seniors Action and Liaison Team. The contents of this documents were to be presented in the now canceled speakers' corner.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is a document entitled Democracy, authored by Mr. Desmond Achilles. This document was also to be presented at the speakers' corner which was canceled.

The third document is a document published by the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group, Alberta chapter, which puts forward their position on the necessity to review the widows' pension. This material was also to have been presented at the speakers' corner which, unfortunately, was canceled.

Mr. Speaker, the final tabling that I have for the Assembly today is original documents, 294 responses to the unity consultation. These responses were submitted by residents of Edmonton-Glenora, and it's my privilege to put them on permanent record with the Assembly.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two tablings. First is a number of letters from the Lymburn parent council asking that funding for private schools not be increased.

The second is 328 submissions from Edmonton-Mill Woods for the unity discussions that we had.

Thank you.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to file with you 10 responses to the unity inquiry. They came from Edmonton-Rutherford. I'd like to file them today on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon on behalf of the citizens of Lethbridge-East to table 454 responses to the unity questionnaire.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I wish to file with the Legislature a letter to the Member for Edmonton-Centre. I was most concerned during her member's statement with the level of misunderstanding of changes made at the human rights and citizenship branch. Indeed this letter explains that in fact there will be 12 additional staff there to assist members. I wanted that to be on the record for all members of the Assembly. I have had a discussion with the Member for Calgary-Buffalo to explain these changes.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to file four copies of a letter which was sent by the United Food & Commercial Workers yesterday to the Premier of the province and copied to me in which the president of the union is asking that the Premier do get involved in helping seek out a new buyer for the now closed Maple Leaf plant.

Thanks.

THE SPEAKER: Pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act I table with the Assembly the following Members' Services orders: 1/97, being Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 1); 2/97, being Members' Group Plans Amendment Order (No.2).

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to other members of this Assembly 10 students from Mexico and 10 Canadian students from Augustana University College who over the past three months have been participating in a rural development exchange program under the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's agricultural initiative program. Accompanying the 20 students are Linda Rubuliak, Mr. Markus Glickman, Kathy McGeean of Canada World Youth, Gabriela Arellano from State University of Morelos, Mexico, Dittmar Mundel, Augustana University College, professor and co-ordinator. Since the group has been working and studying in my constituency, it is an honour for me to ask them to rise and be recognized by this Assembly.

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

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two people that I would like to introduce. The first is the former mayor of Fort Saskatchewan, a former Member of the Legislative Assembly representing that area, the current executive director of the

Alberta Liberal Party, and someone of course who belongs in this Legislative Assembly. I'd ask that Muriel Abdurahman rise and receive the welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: This is not one of those come on down kind of things.

2:00

MR. MITCHELL: We could make room for her over here, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to recognize the chief of staff in our caucus office, who worked extremely hard and very, very effectively on the unity process, the unity questionnaire, and accompanying initiatives and who was also instrumental in developing the preparation for the debate in this Legislative Assembly. I would ask that Mary MacDonald rise and receive the recognition of the Members of the Legislative Assembly. We could also make room for her in this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta four individuals from the Bonanza-Silver Valley area. This area was in fact hit by extreme weather conditions in '96 and '97. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister responsible for children's services.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly two individuals from Slave Lake. One was integrally involved in the unity forums and was a very important individual during the whole forum, and I'd like to say a special thanks today. He's the vice-president of the Métis Nation of Alberta, Mr. Trevor Gladue, and Rose. Could you please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of guests in the gallery today that it is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. I will list them all and then ask them to rise. The first guest is Phyllis Matousek, who is the chair of the Seniors Action and Liaison Team. The group is known as SALT. Accompanying Phyllis are members of SALT: Marguerite Meneely, Walter Derksen, Clare Botsford, and Irene Payne.

Also in the gallery today is Mr. Desmond Achilles, a citizen of this province who is very concerned about the state of democracy in Alberta; Mr. Stephen Curran, who is the president of the University of Alberta students' union; Val Benoit, who is a representative of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group of Alberta, and Val is accompanied by nine other members of her group. Also in the gallery is Joyce Waselenchuk, who is the president of the Alberta Injured Workers Society.

The one thing that all of these concerned Albertans have in common is that they were all prepared to assemble in the rotunda of this Assembly Chamber this afternoon and make their views

known on a series of issues in a speakers' corner, but that forum unfortunately had to be canceled. I would now ask them to all rise and be welcomed in this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**
Minimum Wage

MR. MITCHELL: Even though their parents have jobs, thousands of Alberta children live in poverty everyday, not because their parents are lazy and not because their parents don't want to work; it's because these families live on a minimum wage income, a minimum wage that hasn't been changed by this government one single cent since 1992, Mr. Speaker. As if that isn't enough, now we find the Premier talking about the possibility of lowering the minimum wage. The only explanation can be that this is some kind of offering to the neanderthal faction in this backbench that actually wants to do away with the minimum wage. Attila the Hun would be proud of them. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier simply commit that the minimum wage will not be lowered and in fact commit that the minimum wage will be raised to some kind of reasonable level?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I made no comment whatsoever relative to lowering the minimum wage or getting rid of the minimum wage. As a matter of fact, in conversation with the hon. Minister of Labour, he has no intention either of proposing that the minimum wage be lowered or be eliminated.

As a matter of fact the whole situation by virtue of regulation now has to be reviewed. What the hon. minister said is that because of the sunset clause that is associated with the regulation, if we don't conduct the review and if we don't do something with the regulation, we will have no regulation and the minimum wage will automatically disappear. What we want to do is to do the review. I'm sure the Liberals would want to participate in that review and offer their advice and offer their comments. When the review is complete, it will be taken under consideration by the minister, and if there are adjustments to the regulations that need to be made, they will be made.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier didn't have to wait for a review to find \$130 million for Al-Pac. Why does he have to wait for a review to raise the minimum wage so children in this province don't have to go to school hungry every day?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we haven't found \$130 million for Al-Pac. What we were doing was entertaining a proposal from Al-Pac that they give us \$250 million so we can invest it and over the same interest period make a further \$280 million. The Liberals are now saying that they are opposed to this province making \$280 million. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, you have the floor to ask the question, not other people.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Premier could just address the issue of minimum wage for a single second in this Legislature and tell us whether he ever considers what it is to be a parent earning minimum wage knowing the pain of sending a child to school hungry every day and knowing the pain that child experiences when sitting down in a classroom hungry every day. How do you sleep on that one, Ralph?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is talking as if everyone is on the minimum wage. As a matter of fact all studies show that less than 2 percent of Albertans are living on minimum wage, and 90 percent of the 2 percent are part-time workers, mostly in high school, perhaps some in university. These are not families. These are not parents with children. [interjections] The majority. I said 90 percent of the 2 percent. Let's make it quite clear what we're talking about here.

Mr. Speaker, in fact in this economy today, this wonderful economy that we're enjoying in Alberta today, when we have reduced the welfare roles significantly, 65 percent of those people who went off welfare are now working, and according to the Canada West Foundation, a 1990 study, most of those people are earning more than an average \$7 an hour, which is far above the minimum wage.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Child Poverty

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is more interested in debating and twisting statistics than discussing the reality of hungry and vulnerable children in Alberta. You can split hairs over the definition of poverty, but the fact remains that there are thousands of children in Alberta who are poor. My questions are for the Minister of Family and Social Services. Will the minister admit that there is a child poverty problem in this province and apologize to those thousands of poor children whose existence he wants to deny?

2:10

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must thank the hon. member for giving me this opportunity to talk on child poverty, because child poverty in Canada is an issue. As a matter of fact, on the national scene the social services ministers, the social policy council ministers have put their heads together in an attempt to come up with solutions to child poverty. The national child benefit, which will be coming forward in July of this year, is a huge, huge effort in this direction. The national children's agenda put forward by the federal Liberal government is a huge, huge step in this direction.

Mr. Speaker, for me as the Family and Social Services minister to say that there is no poverty in children in Alberta is ludicrous. For me to say that we recognize that there is an issue, that we are working hard is the absolute truth, and that is what my ministry is all about.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. In working in a spirit of co-operation, will the minister of social services come with me to Norwood and experience firsthand the ravaging effects of being poor, ignored, and without hope?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. The one thing I would point out to the hon. member, though, is that child poverty is not exclusively an Edmonton issue. There is child poverty in Calgary; there is child poverty in the rest of Alberta as well. Absolutely. A hundred percent. I don't have a problem with it.

MS OLSEN: My third question is to the Premier. Will the Premier look into that camera and tell the hungry and poor children of Alberta why this Premier can play Santa Claus when

it comes to Japanese multinationals but turns into Scrooge when it comes to the children of this province?

MR. KLEIN: I'm very happy to tell the children of this province that we're not playing Santa Claus to Japanese multinationals or anyone else. What we're doing is what we were elected to do. What this fantastic majority government is all about is that we're acting prudently and responsibly on behalf of all Albertans and that we are clearly identifying our priorities. Those priorities are people development, all components of education, and health and quality of life, another top priority of this government, which simply means that we pay attention and serve those with a great deal of pride to create dignity, to serve those who truly cannot help themselves in society, and to give those who can contribute to society a hand up rather than a handout.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Child Welfare

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I tabled a report that identifies 20 issues consistently raised by the Children's Advocate in Alberta over the last five years. In the spring session questions were raised surrounding one of these issues, specifically the government's tracking of abuse, neglect, and death of children in care. The Minister of Family and Social Services at the time dismissed the concerns, and now it is clear that the Children's Advocate had been voicing and documenting the same concerns at the same time. I would also note that the two documents tabled by the minister . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: It is time for the question. To the point, please.

MRS. SLOAN: Albertans must have confidence in the government's ability to protect and care for children. Would the minister explain why he would dismiss the public's and the advocate's concerns raised in this House in the spring?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, again I'll reiterate my comments of approximately seven or eight months ago. At that time what I stated was that every child who dies while in the care of Family and Social Services undergoes a fatality inquiry. That is an independent medical board. It's an independent board that looks at all the circumstances of that death. Quite frankly, every child that dies has to have that fatality inquiry review done.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated eight months ago, any time a child dies, period, it's certainly a tragedy, but any time a child dies while under the care and the auspices of our government, it is more of a tragedy. It is something that we are tracking, that we are looking at, and quite frankly I have the utmost confidence that the fatality inquiry review board, the review committee, will find out if there are any problems. And I will give to you: if there are any problems found, we will change them.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. How many children have died this year, and what could the minister tell us about the circumstances surrounding their deaths? These reports tabled today show nothing about those deaths.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, as I just finished saying, the report that was tabled today was the Children's Advocate report. The Children's Advocate is not the one that does these reviews. It is the fatality inquiry review commission that takes a look at these.

Unfortunately I am not that up on whether or not those can be released, but if they can, I will be more than happy to pass a copy of that over to the hon. member.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Will the minister agree to maintain and strengthen the role of the Children's Advocate before regionalization proceeds? Rumours abound that the plan is to eliminate that role provincially.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, again I guess sort of coming from a position of common sense often is not the most practical position to come in when talking to the Liberal opposition. Children's services initiatives are going through a tremendous change right now. They are going through a change. As the Children's Advocate has stated: I must express my support for the many dedicated people of our communities who are creating a new vision for children's services.

The relationship that the Children's Advocate will have in its present form, where it is related to the department, it looks to the department, is going to be different as it applies to the children's authorities. Mr. Speaker, I will guarantee that the Children's Advocate office will not be eliminated. Quite frankly, it is under the Child Welfare Act, so by law we can't, but the relationship, what is the best possible way to have the Children's Advocate function, the best possible way to have the Children's Advocate work is something that will be an evolving process as indeed the children's services authorities are evolving bodies.

Provincial Income Tax

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I find it rather interesting that the Provincial Treasurer, a guy who for the last four years has done nothing but talk about streamlining, hacking, and slashing budgets, now wants Alberta to have its own tax system, which inevitably will be attended by another layer of bureaucracy, almost certainly complicate the lives of ordinary people filling out their tax forms, presumably only to the benefit of tax lawyers and accountants. I'm really curious about this; I'm very curious about this. Given that the existence of things like the provincial flat tax of .5 percent, various surtaxes, the family employment tax credit demonstrates that the current arrangement is pretty flexible for Alberta to do what it wants, I wonder if the Provincial Treasurer would tell us now just what actions he wants to take that are forbidden by the current arrangements.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, if one of our members had asked that question, we would have been accused of setting it up, so I really appreciate the interest that's being shown by the hon. member.

In fact, for a number of years provinces have asked the federal government for the ability to move away from the fixed federal rate and having their taxes based on a percentage of that, to move away from that tax on tax and move to tax on income. It gives far greater flexibility and allows for simplicity also in the system and greater efficiency. Until this point federal Finance ministers have been resistant to do that. It's rare that I would stand in this Assembly and give credit to a Liberal, not because I'm biased but because there's so rarely an opportunity to do so, but I would like to give credit to the federal Finance minister for seeing that provinces who wanted to pursue this particular pathway, Alberta being one of those, should be allowed to do that.

Right now it is very difficult for us to raise things like the personal basic exemptions, the spousal credit. Yes, we can with some regulatory moves change some things, but this gives us flexibility, simplicity, and an ability to address pressures that

Albertans uniquely are facing. In fact, Mr. Speaker, any province wanting to pursue this path makes their tax collection far more transparent. It would be more difficult politically for a province to raise taxes if they have the system which we have now been allowed to pursue than the former system. Practically everybody thinks it's a great idea except the socialists, so I don't understand.

2:20

MS BARRETT: Well, he's right on one point: the socialists don't like it.

Mr. Speaker, considering the only thing that the Provincial Treasurer can't do in the current arrangement is escape the progressive nature of Canada's tax system, isn't the real agenda here to get into a flat tax system, which impoverishes the poor and attacks the middle class? Isn't that what's really going on?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know and Albertans understand that they are the least taxed of all Canadians and that especially on the personal income side we pay the lowest rate. That helps all Albertans. Now, I understand that Ontario is moving to try and compete with us on that particular lane of the tax track, if I can call it that, and we're going to have to look at that.

We are the least taxed already. Our personal income tax rates are the lowest, and we want to look at ways to make that more simple, more directly sensitive to the needs of Albertans, low-income Albertans, all Albertans. It's a wonderful approach. It's been endorsed virtually across the board, even by some socialists that I know other than the member across the way. I'm not sure what her difficulty is with it, but in the ongoing process, which will be consulting with Albertans to see what best suits their needs, I know that she'll want to be involved.

MS BARRETT: Well, if the Treasurer is so committed to looking after the poor and middle-income earners, will he now commit that under any new tax system that pertains to Alberta, Canada's progressive tax bracket system will be retained by this government?

MR. DAY: It's Canada's progressive system that this approach allows us to get out from under. We can actually deal with this. And I'll go further than that.

MS BARRETT: I knew it. Thank you. I knew that's what you wanted to do.

MR. DAY: This is probably the only time I've received applause from a socialist too. We've given credit to a Liberal.

I'll tell you what else . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, before you have to rule her out of order, somebody get her a Valium, quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you where progressive taxation has been hurting the poor. It's happened in the area of tax bracket creep whereby the low-income people are forced, are moved by virtue of inflation into higher tax categories. That's the type of progressivity that hurts. It hurts low income, and it's called tax creep, and the only person who would be against that would be a tax creep.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party for . . .

MS BARRETT: Stealing your questions?

MR. JACQUES: No, not stealing them. You provided a nice backdrop, and it's really nice. Thank you very much.

The answers that were just given by the Provincial Treasurer to various questions, Mr. Speaker, raise two further questions. More specifically to the Provincial Treasurer: what are the details of your plan in terms of consulting with Albertans in terms of this?

MR. DAY: I appreciate the member of the ND opposition asking me these questions beforehand so I could be prepared for this far more incisive request.

Mr. Speaker, remembering that we are still under the federal umbrella of taxation, this will not require entirely separate forms for Albertans to fill out. We are still under that overall umbrella, but we have the freedom to move to the tax-on-income approach. We can address our own tax brackets. We can address our own rates. We can address what I've just said is one of the most insidious forms of progressivity, which is tax bracket creep, the poor and low-income people being pushed up into the higher brackets by virtue of inflation. We can address that now. We can address basic tax credits like the personal tax credit or the spousal credit, whereby people would be able to earn more money before they would be taxed at the provincial level. There are a great number of abilities that we have there.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the meeting and the discussions that took place, my final question is: what progress did the minister achieve in having the federal government move away from implementing new and disastrous spending programs versus the fairness and equity of increased transfer payments?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, there are probably few areas of greater irritation in federal/provincial relations than the one just mentioned. I'm pleased to say that despite the frustration that we've endured as provinces for many years with the federal government typically announcing a program intruding on provincial jurisdiction, coming in and delivering the program, hanging their brass plaque on it, and then after a few years leaving the province holding the can for that particular program – that has been an ongoing irritation. Our Premier has been a leader in the charge to try and diminish and eliminate that type of approach. I can tell you that all provincial finance ministers were agreed.

Actually I will again, twice in one day, give some credit to a Liberal here. Finance Minister Martin has agreed that he would like to approach funding issues using the existing fiscal framework – that would be CHST; that would be equalization payments – rather than rushing in with brand-new federal programs. He has told us clearly that is his preferred approach. We will obviously hold him to that and work with him on that, but that's the indication he's given to us. That's as a result of our Premier leading the charge on this. We hope it continues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Children's Services

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about children again. Children and families are falling through the cracks that this government has allowed to develop between the departments of Health, Education, Family and Social Services, and Justice.

Provincewide standardization, co-ordination, and integration of services for children isn't happening in Alberta. Special-needs children in schools don't get proper diagnosis and treatment because health authorities have other priorities. Children at risk who are clients of social services are placed at risk because neither education nor social services have the resources for comprehensive early intervention programs. My question is to the Premier. How do you propose to ensure minimum standards of living and protection for every child right across this province when we have such a patchwork of overlapping health, education, children's services, and municipal boundaries?

MR. KLEIN: Very good question, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, the hon. minister responsible for children's services is attempting to do that right now, to bring about a better co-ordination of services relative to social services, children's services, related to health, education, and other associated services. I will have her supplement.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Premier. First of all, I want to talk about the system that has been utilized throughout the province with the children's services initiative. Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important to recognize that 12,000 people were involved in developing the kind of system that they see will serve their needs better throughout the community. I think it's a very important perspective when we talk about volunteers who've come to bring their thoughts forward to be able to ensure that they're going to look at the gaps in services, to look at how they can integrate and co-ordinate with the various agencies as well as the various departments. I think this is a very important perspective. It's the first time, I believe, across Canada that we are doing a bottom-up approach to be able to involve the community and ensure that the community is going to be the one who will take on that responsibility.

When we're talking about standards – and I think that's a very important question – standards are something . . . [interjection] You liked the little lift, eh?

2:30

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that such concern for children brings forth such humour in the Legislature.

My question again is to the Premier. Have you considered the possibility of increasing the power of the minister without portfolio responsible for children and families to the point where that minister can co-ordinate and bring about a standardization of the good work that our regional commissioner offices are doing right now? We need standardization across those offices.

MR. KLEIN: Within her existing authority and sphere of responsibility, Mr. Speaker, she has the absolute authority to bring this about.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that every moment in the life of a child – a special-needs child, a hungry child, an abused child – is lost forever, how soon can these children expect more response from this government, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, since the hon. minister is working on the program, I'll have her respond.

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really very pleased,

as a matter of fact, to be able to say that we're almost nearing the end of our planning phase. We recognize that the planning phase has taken some time to ensure that the children don't fall through the cracks. We want to make sure that the safety and health of the children are kept where we don't have to worry about them. That planning phase is almost complete. I would predict that within this coming year we'll have a system in place to be able to look at regional authorities being appointed, and that will be coming fairly quickly. I can assure you that in the integration, in terms of the standardization, we are working together to be able to ensure that that happens. All the ministers who have been partners in this whole initiative have been onside: the Minister of Education, the minister of social services, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Community Development, and the Minister of Health. So I really feel that we have a totally community-based system.

Basically, Mr. Speaker, what we've got is a system that's working together to be able to ensure that we continue to work in a manner where the communities can take over the responsibility and the authority for their children and families.

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

Livestock Pollution Control

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. This past summer there have been many questions in our part of the province, southern Alberta, particularly Feedlot Alley, about manure management and water quality. My question to the minister today: what is the department's goal, Mr. Minister, with respect to increasing livestock production in an area that already has one of the largest numbers of intensive livestock operations in the whole province?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through consultation around the province with industry, we've established that by the year 2005 globally we want to attain a goal of \$10 billion primary and \$20 billion value added. That's for the whole province. With respect to where this growth is going to take place, that final decision will still be vested in locally elected municipal councils. We will be assisting them through the code of practice and perhaps through consultation with municipalities drafting some regulations, but the actual siting decisions will still be made by local municipal councils.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question: what safeguards are in place presently, Mr. Minister, to protect our soils from harmful pollutants?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, presently we have one document, which is the code of practice that we've asked municipalities to adopt in their municipal bylaws. Further to that, we are working with the Department of Health and the department of the environment to look at not only reviewing the current code of practice but looking at how we can perhaps look at additional regulations.

One of the things in the code of practice that has been brought to our attention by the industry is that you may have, let's say, 10 hogs to 10 acres required for manure disposal. If that farmer only distributes the manure on two of those 10 acres, well, obviously that particular code is not going to do justice in terms of phos-

phate and nitrogen levels. So as a result, we're looking at coming up with soil sample standards at optimum levels of nitrogen and phosphorus and phosphate.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: Mr. Minister, what do you propose to do if the local municipalities are unable to address these issues in a local manner or, for that matter, if the industry is unable to respond?

MR. STELMACH: One of the best things we have in this province is the reputation worldwide for good, clean, wholesome food. One of the reasons we're able to grow that food is that we do have clean air, clean water, and clean soil. We have to maintain the pristine environment that we enjoy, and if we maintain that environment for years to come, we will sustain agricultural growth.

With respect to those municipalities that have some trouble in terms of incorporating the code of practice into their bylaws, we're going to, again, work with them further to see why, because quite frankly it is to their advantage to incorporate them into their bylaws. Then we have a document, some regulations that can be enforced. We will supplement that, again, through further discussion with the municipalities as to how we can assist them through the departments of agriculture and environment and Health in ensuring that we maintain the pristine environment of this province.

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

Family Violence

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Christmas season is not always a festive time for many Alberta children. I'm speaking of children throughout this province who witness unspeakable horrors in their own homes, plagued with domestic violence. Their only hope is to flee the situation and seek refuge in one of Alberta's 28 shelters. Unfortunately, for many children and their mothers even this hope is stripped away from them. My question is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Why were over 8,400 mothers and children fleeing from abusive situations turned away from shelters this year?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get into my answer, there must be one thing that is made perfectly clear, and that thing is that when these women are turned away from the shelters because they are full, Family and Social Services puts them up in a registered hotel. This is not – and I will be the first one to admit it – the optimum place for these women to be. However, there are times when the shelters are full. We do not turn these women back out. We do not put them back into the abusive situations. In Alberta there are no women that are put back into the abusive situations from which they come.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, doesn't the minister realize that there is no support in a hotel room, that there are no education programs, that there is nothing to keep them safe, nothing but a bed and four walls? That is not good enough.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I find myself not wanting to say this, but I will anyway. I actually agree with what the hon. member has said. In fact, if they read the paper this morning, they may

have noticed my musings about women in shelters who are not battered. We have a very interesting situation in Alberta right now where approximately 80 percent of the women in women's shelters are battered women, and these women come from absolutely horrible, horrible home situations. We have to strive in Alberta not to necessarily call them abused women; it is family violence. It is family violence that we are talking about. We have to strive to put as many resources as possible to help these women out. That's what we're doing in this department.

MRS. SOETAERT: My final question: when is the minister going to realize that in order to stop the cycle of violence, you have to have more support than a bed? Why won't you properly fund outreach programs and education programs and break this cycle? That's what you do.

DR. OBERG: Again I find myself in this position of agreeing with the hon. member. If I can, I'd just like to tell you some of the services that my department is responsible for and working with. We are a partner in the Edmonton and Calgary police services' spousal violence support team. There is an informal partnership with Municipal Affairs redeveloping partnerships in communities so that the subsidized housing first goes to women that have experienced family violence. Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton Family Violence Prevention Centre is a partner with us. There is the Calgary Violence Information and Education Centre; community-funded follow-up and outreach programs and women's shelters; the partnership between Family and Social Services and the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters – I apologize for taking so long, but it is a large list of what we actually do – the Victorian Order of Nurses; the people in crisis program; the ADT alarm project.

Let's go to training, Mr. Speaker. There is the office for prevention of family violence, three-phase multidisciplinary training on family violence – I wish I could go on and finish.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: Well, I know it's a very serious matter, hon. minister. But perhaps those people who are observing question period today and who are in need might just call your office and get referred to the appropriate authority throughout the province of Alberta.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

English as a Second Language

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the realities of present-day Alberta is that there are thousands of children who do not speak English as they enter our school systems. It is regrettable that students who do not develop the necessary language skills are at a greater risk of being marginalized, victimized, exploited, or of dropping out of school without completing high school. To allow this to continue, in my opinion, is morally and ethically wrong. To the Minister of Education: what resources are available to help students who need to learn English as a second language?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, for the thousands of students that were referred to by the hon. member – by our latest count there are roughly 6,500 students in the province of Alberta who were born outside of Canada who require English as a Second Language – for those students this province provides an additional \$644 a year

of funding for a period of three years. We provide that money to school boards, and then school boards will assess the individual needs of students in meeting their ESL students' needs.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, would the same minister clarify for this House why we fund ESL for only three years, especially for children who enter our schools at a later grade?

MR. MAR: We think that three years is about right in terms of ensuring that an ESL student moves as quickly as possible into a regular classroom. It is true that there are younger students who may be able to integrate into regular school programs more quickly, and perhaps it would take a little longer for a student who is older who comes into our school system. But overall, Mr. Speaker, it's our view that three years of funding for ESL provides students with the language skills that they need to function in a regular classroom.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary is to the same minister. What about the Canada-born students who need ESL? What sources of funding are available to them, and if there isn't any funding, will the minister make a commitment to adequately fund ESL for new Canadians and Canada-born students who need English as a tool to become productive citizens in our society?

AN HON. MEMBER: Next question.

MR. MAR: I hear from the side opposite that this is an excellent question, and I agree.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have an obligation to fund English as a Second Language programs, whether that student is born abroad or born in Canada. It came as a surprise to me, prior to my time as Minister of Education, to find out that there are students who come to our schools, sometimes in rural parts of Alberta, who speak only Cree or some other language, and there are students that come to our schools speaking only German and other languages. That's both a rural and an urban school board issue. I agree that we do need to take a better look at this group of students, who are born within Canada but do not speak English as a first language, and determine the best means of helping them acquire English language skills.

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

Child Prostitution

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Assembly amended the Child Welfare Act to say that a child involved in prostitution is in fact a victim of sex abuse. The government indicated that one of its purposes for this change was to allow police to charge johns who pick up children with child sexual abuse. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: how many johns of child prostitutes have been charged with sex abuse under the Child Welfare Act since this change came into force about six months ago?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I do not have that information at hand, but I would be more than happy to find that information for the hon. member.

Mr. Speaker, I must really address this very important issue of child prostitution. With the help of the Member for Calgary-Fish

Creek, who has done a fabulous job in this area, we are taking steps to bring forward legislation in the spring sitting that North America does not have. North America is applauding this legislation that is coming forward. We have had inquiries from Missouri, from all sorts of states in the U.S., and from all of North America. I introduced this topic at a child prostitution seminar that was in Calgary, and it was extremely, extremely touching when I had social workers coming up to me with tears in their eyes saying: thank you very much; thank you for doing this.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister about what he's done, if he had some figures, not about intentions.

Since your director of child welfare, Mr. Minister, already has the authority to apprehend children who are working as prostitutes, to apprehend them and hold them in protective custody, why is the minister now planning to introduce some bill which would make this a police matter and thus reinforce the myth that these children are criminals instead of the victims that they really are?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I cannot agree with the hon. member as I could with his counterpart. What we are doing is exactly categorically opposite. What we're doing in the first part of our bill, which was what we had passed in the last session, is stating that the children involved in child prostitution are victims of sexual abuse. The second part of this will be coming through in this session, and what we will be targeting is the pimps. We will be targeting the people who prey on these children. This is a dramatic amount of people, even in Alberta. Often we tend to think that this doesn't occur in Alberta, but it certainly is here. As I said before, I really would ask the hon. member to wait for the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, I'd like to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to comment on this as well.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Criminal Code exists. The Child Welfare Act exists. You could do it now. You don't need to wait.

Mr. Minister, how many times has the existing provision been used to come to the rescue of child prostitutes in this province and to take them into the protective custody of Family and Social Services? What are you waiting for?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, again, I will certainly look at that, but one of the issues in child prostitution in society in general is that this is a group of people that we tend to turn our eyes from. We tend to turn away and say that they don't exist. Well, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has taken it upon herself and has done an absolutely fabulous job.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the hon. member to look beyond this Assembly, to look beyond this province at what is happening in North America. This legislation that is coming forward will put Alberta on the map when it comes to child prostitution. This legislation that is coming forward will be the model for legislation across North America.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

2:50

Driver Education

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. Earlier this year the Chauvin school was

notified that the driver education program will be eliminated in the 1998-99 school year. The nearest driver training service is 70 kilometres away from this community. These programs provide essential driver safety education to students and greatly contribute to the reduction in fatalities among our young people. Can the minister explain why these vital programs no longer will be offered in our schools?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, when driver education programs were introduced in the province in 1971, they filled a gap in the availability of traffic safety programs, driver education skills that existed at that time. That gap no longer exists. Private-sector driver education courses are offered throughout the province of Alberta that offer both in-class and in-car training. Opportunities to obtain this education through the private sector have increased substantially. Many if not most schools in fact contract out part or all of their driver education programs to the private sector, with costs still being charged to the parents of the students who are involved.

The change has been introduced for two reasons. First of all, the programs can and are being offered through the private sector and offer the same benefit to students in terms of education and to parents in terms of reductions in insurance rates. Secondly, students who already complete their driver education through private operators do not receive high school credits for that training while those that take them through the school do receive credits, and in my strong opinion, Mr. Speaker, that inequity could not continue to exist.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain, then, why the students will no longer receive their high school credits for this all-important program?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, while I agree with the comments of the hon. member that this is an important program, as I indicated, there are numerous private-sector opportunities to obtain the benefit of driver training. It is an equity issue. Students who take driver education through schools receive credits, and there are many pressures upon those credit programs within our school system as to which ought to be funded and which ought not to be funded. It is my view that driver education, while important, is not as important as many of the other credit programs that are offered through schools.

MR. FISCHER: To the same minister. The elimination of the driver training in schools will mean that the parents will have to pay the full cost of that training at a private driving school. Will there be any increase in the cost to the parents of providing this important training?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, there of course is no increase in the cost to parents who already send their children to take driver education programs through private-sector operators. But those parents who send their children to driver education through the school system may experience an increase in the cost, although they already do pay a significant amount to cover the cost of driver education, even though it is through the school system. Parents in both situations will still benefit from reduced insurance premiums.

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

Aboriginal Children's Services

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As over 50 percent of children in care are aboriginal, it's essential that the redesign of children's services pay attention to the needs of these children. Many reserves want to manage their own children's services, but the provincial government really has the ultimate responsibility for the welfare of all these children. My question is to the minister of social services. Will the minister ensure that the aboriginal community is given real input into the aboriginal child welfare policy section in the third and final draft of the provincial standards for children's services?

DR. OBERG: Yes.

MS LEIBOVICI: Excellent.

Can the minister explain how he will do that and also explain if there will be enough qualified individuals in order to provide the care that children need in the aboriginal communities?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anytime you have a segment of the population that accounts for roughly 40 to 45 percent yet only has a population of around 10 percent in Alberta, it's certainly a concern. Even more so, we absolutely have to listen to them. I believe the hon. member's question was the number of aboriginal workers attending to children's services. We talked to the tribal authorities, and what they stated is that absolutely they want to be involved, that absolutely they want to have the aboriginal child welfare workers involved.

Mr. Speaker, someone who would be more knowledgeable would be the minister without portfolio responsible for children's services.

THE SPEAKER: Fine. I think we'll just carry on.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister has indicated that he wants more involvement, will he ensure that at least half the members who are going to be on the regional authorities will be members from the aboriginal community, as he himself promised?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, as with any government board or government agency, what we look at first and foremost is quality. Quite frankly, certainly, absolutely aboriginals being on these boards is critical, but we also look at the quality of the individuals.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to supplement that. I think it's very important when we're talking about the aboriginal community. First of all, there are some concerns in terms of certification and accreditation. The standards model that's out there as a draft in terms of getting consultation from the communities is certainly going to go to the aboriginal communities, because I think it's very important, as we deal with their children, that they are also involved in whatever we're going to do. I think it's important for all people who are interested in being involved that they get a draft of the consultation on the standards model and come forward with some more information. And yes, we are anxiously awaiting that kind of input.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has now left us.

head: **Orders of the Day**
 head: **Government Motions**
National Unity

23. Moved by Mr. Klein:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be guided by the input received from Albertans during the public consultation process, Dialogue on Unity, and on behalf of the people of Alberta concur with the principles embodied in the elements of the Calgary framework, recognizing that the Calgary framework is not an amendment to the Constitution acts of 1867 to 1982 and that the specific wording of any amendment to those acts must be approved by Albertans in a referendum in accordance with the Constitutional Referendum Act.

[Adjourned debate December 9: Dr. Oberg]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to reflect, as we talk about unity and this particular declaration, on what my constituents have been telling me. In written form 280 of them specifically filled out their packages and sent them in or delivered them personally to me. Of the 280, 65 said that they could not support this framework as it stands. Another 103 said that they could support it but have difficulties with point 5 – and that's been alluded to many times here in the Assembly – and 112 said that they could support it as it stands right now.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think it's fair to say, at least for constituents of Red Deer-North, that that reflects what I hear on the street and at various functions around the community. The majority are reflecting the general sentiment that this type of framework is the way to go, and a portion of them have a concern with possible interpretation related to point 5 and really the phrase talking about uniqueness. I don't mind saying that I share the same concern. Overall I'm supportive of this framework for discussion.

I don't have a problem with what I believe to be Alberta's interpretation of what "unique" means relative to any province or relative to Quebec, because in Alberta we also talk about all provinces being equal. We have very vigorously been pursuing a principle of federal/provincial relations which requires, as a matter of fact, that anything that can be achieved by one province vis-à-vis federal relations should be available to other provinces if they so desire that particular item.

In the context of what Alberta is saying, I don't have worries about the possible negative interpretations of using the "unique" approach, though it is good to remember that the word "unique" does mean one of a kind, and in many ways each of us as provinces is one of a kind. If that's what we're talking about and that's the Alberta intent, to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec, of Ontario, of Alberta, then I join with most of my constituents in not having difficulty with that. Obviously we have a concern, those of us who look at that particular phraseology, with how the judiciary may down the road interpret the approach "unique" when it comes to certain constitutional items. That is where, as the discussion moves along and moves past these chambers and out of these chambers, there has to be some clearer definition.

3:00

Overall, on the question itself really what we're talking about is: should this declaration provide a framework for discussion?

I have no problem saying: absolutely. This framework should provide the discussion points and the frame of reference from which Albertans and Canadians as a matter of fact can agree or disagree. Mr. Speaker, many times when we get into this discussion either in this Assembly or in our neighbourhoods, we either individually or collectively groan and say: "Oh, here we go again. Why are we doing this discussion again?"

History is an interesting topic. History by its very nature repeats itself. Winston Churchill said: the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history. History on this topic is fascinating. I don't know if you are up to a little trivia question, Mr. Speaker. I know you can't respond in the middle of my speech unless I'm out of order, which I don't think I would be. To which politician do you think this quote refers, to which elected person? Here's the quote: he induced half the members of Ontario to help in levying on their own province the necessary blackmail for Quebec, yet this is the work which will have to be done if a general breakup is to be avoided; things will not hold together on their own. To which politician was that directed?

MR. MITCHELL: To John A. Macdonald.

MR. DAY: To John A. Macdonald by none other than Wilfrid Laurier about some imminent breakup that was going to be happening soon after this country began to pull together, albeit with the original provinces.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the history, it's not just Quebec that has been on the record with certain large portions of their population wanting to separate. In fact, in the 1870s and into the 1880s there were a number of different times that Canadians of the day had to rally to keep Nova Scotia in. If we would have lost Halifax, especially at that point in time or even today, as a major seaport, that would have been a real blow. Yet Canadians rose to the occasion, and that has happened through our history. I daresay that whether it be from Quebec or other provinces, these types of pressures will continue to arise. It's natural in a family that you have these types of discussions and that you have these types of differences. Our history is great. That's one challenge in this country.

Mackenzie King said, "If some countries have too much history, we have too much geography." That's another challenge that we face. It's not going to go away, the distance that we are from one another. Mr. Speaker, are these challenges so great that we should avoid the debate, that we should avoid the discussion and possibly run some risks that we do not want to face and do not want to have to look at? I don't think so. I'm willing to do what it takes to get involved in this discussion in an ongoing way.

I think the risks for Albertans about something being imposed on them are minimal because our Premier has taken the lead and guaranteed that there will be no constitutional change, no constitutional amendment unless the people of Alberta stand up in a referendum and say: we want this or we want that. That gives me great comfort in engaging in this particular discussion. We should not fear the discussion. We should not back off because it's happened before. I think of my grandfather on the paternal side of my family and his involvement for this country in the First World War. What would I have thought if my grandfather on the maternal side had said in the Second World War, "Oh, here we go again; I'm sitting this one out." If enough people had done that, then the very fabric in which we have this discussion today might not even be in place. So we cannot back off from the discussion because it's happened before and in fact because there

have been casualties before. I believe that the country is worth speaking to on these issues.

If I were speaking in the 1870s and 1880s to Nova Scotia from – Alberta wasn't, obviously, incorporated then – another point of view of another province, I would not have said to Nova Scotia: "At any cost we will keep you in. We will send our tax dollars to you. We will send our wheat to you. At any cost we'll keep you in." I would not have said that. But I would have said to Nova Scotia: I will do what I can to try and convince you that this is a good arrangement. A perfect arrangement? No. The Confederation is far from perfect. But is it good? I think it's very good, and I think history shows that.

I'm not an internationalist. I don't believe in disintegration. I don't believe in one monolithic, united, worldwide community. I believe nations have a place. I believe Canada has had a place and will continue to have a place.

The words of Alexander Solzhenitsyn on the importance of nations somehow gripped me today. I close with a quotation of his.

The disappearance of nations would impoverish us no less than if all peoples were made alike, with one character, one face.

Nations are the wealth of mankind, they are its generalized personalities: the smallest of them has its own particular colors and embodies a particular facet of God's design.

I think that design is worth maintaining. That's why I think we should continue the discussion, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud and humble to have had the opportunity to participate in this process. I've had the privilege of being in St. Andrews, in Calgary, and in Winnipeg for Premiers' conferences and on Monday of tabling the report *My Canada Is*, Albertans Speak Out on National Unity. The fact that a small-town boy who grew up in primarily native communities in northern B.C. and northern Alberta can be here to participate like this speaks so much for our country and its opportunities.

I want to acknowledge the leadership of our Premier, Ralph Klein. Our Premier insisted among his colleagues that at some point provinces needed to be involved in the discussion on national unity. He insisted that before there was any national discussion, there needed to be consultations with Albertans. He insisted that consultations should be open and transparent, bottom to top, and provide an opportunity for all Albertans to be involved, and he was right. He resisted any attempt to make the Calgary framework a constitutional deal. It was intended to be and it is a set of elements, a start of the discussion, an opportunity for Canadians to talk about their country and, yes, to send a message to the people of Quebec. Our Premier's leadership and vision were instrumental in developing what we now proudly call the Calgary framework. It's no accident that the framework encompasses the feelings of Albertans when we have a leader with such a strong understanding of his constituents.

Mr. Speaker, this process has been about our Canada. My Canada is a country where all Canadians, regardless of origin, mother tongue, province or region, are equal and have equal rights protected by law. Equality is not a word to be used to mean the same, nor does the protection of rights mean rights can be exercised without recognition of the concomitant responsibilities.

My Canada is a country where we celebrate the diversity of our provinces and regions but respect that each of our provinces has an equality of status. In Alberta we have long expressed the view that we want to be governed close to home on matters that are

close to home. We recognize that while each province must be free to develop the richness of the economic and social character of their provinces, we exist in a federal framework, and we contribute our strengths and our diversity to make our country stronger.

My Canada is a country graced by a diversity, tolerance, compassion, and an equality of opportunity that is without rival in the world, a diversity which allows and encourages people to be the best that they can be, which allows us to learn from each other and to build on each other's strengths.

Tolerance: not a tolerance which means putting up with but a tolerance that means understanding, a tolerance which means appreciation, a tolerance which means acceptance, a tolerance which means celebrating our differences.

Compassion: compassion because while we are all equal before the law, we do not all share the same good fortune.

Equality of opportunity is the underpinning of our country. We're not there yet; we need to continue to strive, again not to make us all the same but to ensure that we all have the chance.

There is no better country than Canada, where this diversity, tolerance, compassion, and equality of opportunity come together. Some Albertans have suggested that we should not brag about being without rival in the world, but in those areas at least, Mr. Speaker, we are without rival in the world. While I understand the natural Canadian modesty, I believe we should not be afraid or reluctant to promote our strengths. Throughout the world people fight and struggle for the opportunity to have what we so often take for granted.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, my Canada is a country where our diversity starts with and embraces the aboriginal people, the first people of this nation. Their cultures, languages, way of life, respect for the land and for nature, and many other values provide a strong and vibrant part of our country. As we meet the challenges of building our nation in the new millennium, we need to address both the problems created in the past by having denied the importance of aboriginal peoples' culture and values to our Canadian mosaic and the opportunity to design a new relationship where their goals and aspirations can be achieved.

Our nation's diversity is also bolstered by the contribution of a multicultural citizenry drawn from all parts of the world. In a world where we are moving from an industrial economy based on natural resources to an economy based on information and service, how will we compete? The strength of our natural resources base will not provide a competitive advantage. What we do have in Canada is the strength of having friends and relatives all over the world. Our diversity is our strength.

My Canada, Mr. Speaker, includes Quebec. While we in Alberta want to be sure that we have the same status as all other Canadians, we are prepared to recognize the reality that Quebec has a unique character to its society and that that unique character contributes strongly to the unique character of our nation in the world.

In my Canada no province has special status. Powers available to one must be available to all. We don't all want to be the same, but we do want to have the same ability to build on our strengths.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my Canada is a federal system. We need strong provinces in a strong country. We need a clear understanding of the respective jurisdictions. We need co-operative federalism: governments working together in partnership to serve the needs of Canadians. We have come a long way; however, in the wake of the recent Kyoto process, we still have some way to go.

Mr. Speaker, this process has been the most extensive process undertaken on the views of Albertans on Canadian unity, indeed one of the most extensive on any topic, and we are known for our public involvement and public consultation. This is not a public opinion survey. This is a public participation process. Albertans have spoken and written volumes, and we have heard them.

The key to the consultation process was the role played by all members of the Legislature from all parties. Colleagues, you met with constituents in town halls, focus groups, schools, shopping centres, and in many other ways and in each way have taken a personal approach to the consultation supported by the householder, the 1-800 line, the web site, and the fax line. You have proven what I have always said: this Legislature is the ultimate constituents' Assembly. The variety and vitality of input, this thoughtful and articulate expression of values and aspirations could only be generated by such an open consultation process.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Over the last three days we have heard that response. Over 76 percent of Albertans agreed with the Calgary framework. Only 14 percent rejected it outright. Mr. Speaker, that is a clear endorsement. However, Albertans have given us much to think about. Some added other items that they wished discussed. I had the opportunity to participate in a meeting between Premiers and national aboriginal leaders and to confirm with the aboriginal leaders in Alberta concerns about the term "gift," concerns that there should be an additional element dealing with the role of aboriginal people. At Winnipeg it was agreed that in any future constitutional discussions aboriginal leaders should be involved.

In preparing my remarks today I was guided by the input received from constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud. I held two roundtables, and we had over 100 people between the two meetings. In addition I attended seven parent advisory councils and two community leagues. Many other constituents called or wrote. I received papers from high school social studies classes, and with the 483 responses to the householders which I received, many of which represented the views of two or more family members and which I would now like to table in the Legislature, I estimate that over 1,000 constituents have been involved. Over 84 percent of respondents from Whitemud supported the framework. I've also had the privilege of traveling this province and participating in meetings from a high school in Sexsmith to Camrose to Calgary.

The people of Edmonton-Whitemud and the people I met across Alberta want to affirm and express their strong desire for the unity of this country. They had a predominant emphasis on equality – equality of people, equality of provinces – and no special status. There was also a recognition that we are strong enough and the concept of equality is flexible enough to recognize and respect the diversity which is found in our country and reflected by the aboriginal people, by our multicultural citizenry, and by the reality that is Quebec.

The reality is that Quebec is the only province with a French-speaking majority, where the government of the province operates in that language, and where the civil law of that province is based on a European Civil Code that has been in existence since the foundation of the colony in New France in the 1600s. The power to protect and promote that culture rests within the existing constitutional provisions. The power of the Legislature and government of Quebec to protect language, culture, and civil laws of that province are no different than the powers of the other

provinces of Canada. The difference is the context in which those powers are exercised, a French-speaking majority population that has enjoyed a collective sense of culture from solidarity.

Today, Mr. Speaker, is focused on the Calgary framework, a set of nonconstitutional elements. Just two years ago a Quebec referendum came close to fundamentally altering this country. Many Albertans were frustrated at that time because they had no say, no way of being involved. Well, this process solves that problem. The framework does address the Quebec issue, but the framework is not just about Quebec. It's about the kind of country we want to have. We as Albertans, as Canadians have the courage and the fortitude to forge a new Canada, a Canada not chained to the past or mired in the present but cognizant of the best that the past and present have to offer, striving boldly and confidently into the future, united.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: To close debate on this motion as per the unanimous request of consent granted Monday, December 8, the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've really enjoyed listening the last few days to the debate in the Assembly on this matter. I must say I've been impressed with the passion and conviction with which members on all sides of the House spoke about their love for their country and their desire to see Canada remain strong and united into the next millennium. Yesterday I had the privilege of meeting with some members of the Royal Canadian Legion, who gave me a document that they thought had been given to me before but I could not find. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark had the same problem. She made a copy of it for me, and I thank her. I did say that I would make some references on the record to this document, which was filed earlier today in the Chamber.

The Legion drafted a paper called *Our Belief in Canada*, which believes in a united Canada. It believes that federal services should be available in both official languages. It believes in a strong national government, the rule of law, the Parliament of Canada. The one item that I really liked here was: "We believe that the Constitution should reflect the will of the people." I think that's a pretty important statement, and the reason I raise it now is because I believe that the Calgary declaration, the framework for national unity, does reflect the people's will in Alberta. I wouldn't be here to endorse it if I thought otherwise.

I believe that Canadians and Albertans are tired of political manipulation on any or all issues, not least of which would be this particular issue as we head into what is probably another round of constitutional discussion and perhaps change. Albertans have a right to hear more from their politicians than flowery rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, a sentiment that we all share regardless of our political differences.

In addition to talking about the importance of keeping Canada united, Albertans have been asking: where does the process go from here? I'm looking forward to the closing comments of the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Premier about some of their thoughts as to where we go from here should this Legislature endorse the Calgary framework and if the Legislatures of the other provinces and territories do the same. Well, a couple already have.

So I would like to share my thoughts on this matter. First of all, I think we need to be careful not to lull ourselves into a false sense of security. Just because most Albertans expressed support,

the Calgary framework doesn't automatically mean that they will support a constitutional amendment down the road. There is an indication, but there's no assurance, and we shouldn't kid ourselves. I believe that there are some aspects of the Calgary framework that we need to keep in mind as we move to the next stage of national renewal.

3:20

One of the things Albertans appreciated about the Calgary framework was that it wasn't cast in stone. Congratulations to all the Premiers and the leaders of the territorial governments for drafting something that wasn't cast in stone, because I believe it would have failed to enjoy public support had it been.

We didn't put an all-or-nothing choice in front of Albertans. Rather, Albertans were provided with an opportunity to provide their own comments and suggestions on a framework for discussion. I believe there was some public criticism of the open-ended nature of the questions that were in the questionnaire that went to every household. Well, almost every household. There were many households that were missed, apparently, because they weren't delivered by Canada Post; they were delivered by private flyer deliverers. In any event, presumably anybody who really wanted to get a copy could and did.

There was some criticism about the open-ended nature of the questions. Well, I went to a news conference with the opposition leader and the Premier, endorsing this process, including that document because the questions were open-ended. I don't think we should corner people on subjects as important as the future of our country, and I don't think we should make statements that make people feel cornered to say yes or no in a categorical fashion. If we ever get to the stage of putting a constitutional amendment in front of Albertans, we need to keep this in mind. Instead of putting an all-or-nothing constitutional amendment in front of Albertans where no "i" can be undotted or no "t" uncrossed, perhaps we should have a draft amendment on which Albertans could make comments first. After this, the amendment could go back to a First Ministers' meeting for some final fine-tuning.

Secondly, it seems to me that Albertans are more willing to recognize the unique character of Quebec so long as it is placed within the context of the equality of status of all provinces. Through the consultation process on the Calgary framework some shortcomings have been identified, in particular the need to better recognize the unique place of aboriginal peoples within Canada and, as well, the observations made in the letter to MLAs from the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. These shortcomings I think need to be addressed prior to any constitutional amendment being put forward. Otherwise, it's going to be a nonstarter, and that is particularly true for the First Nations people.

Another message I've heard strongly from the constituents who attended my town hall meeting on the subject is that the element in the Calgary framework that talks about the equality of all Canadians is more rhetoric than reality. A lot of these people were not politically motivated. You know, they're not hard-core New Democrats, hard-core Liberals, or Conservatives. A lot of them were politically unaffiliated, and they were all singing from the same song sheet on that subject. I found that very interesting. They noted that disparities between Canadians appear to be growing, and I agree with them. We appear to be coming less, not more, equal. Now, I'm going to interpret what I heard and put my political spin on it because I can't help but do that. I'm very political.

In an increasingly globalized world goods, services, and investment cross national boundaries without any restrictions. In such a world I believe we need to look carefully at those things that bind us together as Canadians and provide us with a sense of common citizenship. When Canadians were asked what makes them proud about being Canadian, they mentioned things like the red Maple Leaf and our national anthem. Sure. But in poll after poll Canadians also mentioned our shared social programs as a source of national pride as way more important when it comes to describing what binds us together. They mentioned our national medicare system, in which all Canadians receive high-quality health care regardless of their level of income. They mentioned our public education system, which gives our children a relatively equal quality of education. They mentioned our pensions and our unemployment insurance systems.

A message I certainly heard from my constituents is that we need strong national standards to safeguard our health care, the education of our children, a clean environment, and the social safety net that binds us as Canadians. These are programs that are truly cherished, and I worry – I worry – that starting at tomorrow's First Ministers' meetings, there will be ministers trying to chop them apart again, redivide them, slice them again.

The people I talk to about this subject or about health, education, and social services in general all say that we need to strengthen them. You want a strong Canada? Strengthen the social programs that we believe in, the institutions that provide for the common good. The common good is a reflection of the notion of society. In other words, we do not simply exist as a bunch of individuals in a certain geographically defined area; we are a society. We choose to be, and we choose to support the institutions that provide for the common good. These people say and I could not agree more wholeheartedly: don't let these elements of Canada which distinguish us from virtually any other country in the world be chopped away or eliminated. Albertans want the federal and provincial governments to work together to achieve these important goals that bind us as a nation and to stop their further erosion.

I remain to be convinced that it would be wise to move to actual constitutional negotiations should the Calgary framework be endorsed, as I suspect it will be. My first reaction when I read the Premier's comments in the press about having a constitutional amendment in place by next fall was: "Oh? Do you think that's possible?" I'm not so sure. Let's not forget that we still have a separatist government in the province of Quebec, and its Premier has said that he doesn't want to go for a general election prior to next fall. Well, I don't see Lucien Bouchard going along with any constitutional amendment. I quite frankly can't see it. So would it be wise to move to the next stage when it is pretty clear that the PQ government will not be participating in the discussions? Would we once again be leaving ourselves open to the accusation that we are once again proceeding without Quebec? We cannot be open to those accusations. We cannot be doing it, nor can we be seen to be doing it.

Well, these are difficult questions that will call on the wisdom of our political leaders to resolve. I believe that the Calgary framework is a good beginning. I hope it sends a positive message that we value all provinces and peoples in our federation.

In closing, I would like to state again that I have appreciated hearing and then reading in *Hansard* the comments from the other members of this Assembly, which I believe reflected what they heard in their own constituencies and which I think is ultimately the most important thing a politician can do: be honest; reflect

what you heard; reflect what you saw; and have the courage to state both. [interjection] Thank you, Ralph. Sorry; I should have said, "Thank you, Mr. Premier." Sorry about that. You know, the funny thing, Mr. Speaker, is that when you're out of this building for four years and you're doing interviews, you forget that in the Legislature you're supposed to use official titles, and you end up referring to people by their first names inadvertently. After another year or two you will have me sufficiently retrained; I promise.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the comments of the other leaders and the opportunity to vote in favour of this important step towards national reconciliation.

Thank you.

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

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I want to thank every Member of this Legislative Assembly, the Premier, and the leader of the New Democratic Party for what I would describe as perhaps amongst the most memorable moments and experiences that I have had in my 11 years in this Legislative Assembly. While we do many things day after day that are important to the people of this province and in some cases important to the people of this country, while we wrestle with issues that can make a true difference to how people live, to their quality of life, there is something about this issue, this debate over the last three days, that transcends most of what we do and that has a much higher purpose and a much higher reason in our lives.

Canada is a remarkably special place, and while these three days have gone quite quickly, they are three very significant and important days in the life of this province and in the life of this country. Each Member of this Legislative Assembly has had something to do with that and has contributed in a very positive way to a debate which I feel has distinguished itself in a number of important ways. One is that it's been without any acrimony and based on a spirit of co-operation. I particularly like that, because I know that when you generate a set of values, of core values, for an organization or a party or a province or a country, it's very important that they are reflected in what you do or they don't mean very much. So it was particularly appropriate that we should address values like equality and tolerance and compassion and understanding, those embodied in this framework, in this Legislature in the way that each of us have.

3:30

I also want to say that this has been one of the most memorable experiences for me, one of the most pleasant experiences for me in the Legislature, because it has been an awfully long time since I have heard a group of people of this position in life and in our society taking the time to speak in such a concerted fashion, in such positive ways, with such deep and heartfelt belief and concern for Canada. I think all too often we live in this wonderful place, we have all the advantages of this wonderful place, and we think about the future for our children in a way that people around the world can only imagine thinking about futures for their children, and it is so easy to do that because of what we have that we begin to take it for granted.

Above all else – above its environment, above its wealth, above its health, above its cleanliness, above its opportunities – Canada is an idea. It's an idea in people's minds across this country: people in the Maritimes and in the west and in Ontario and in Quebec. Ideas can never be taken for granted, because you can't see them all the time and you have to make a point of thinking

about them. So it is very, very significant that we took three days to raise that idea, to once again give it the prominence of the ideal that it is and should be to all of us and to nurture it for these three days. I think it's a lesson that we should never forget, that it's been far too long since the last time we stopped to do that. Each of us, leaders as we are, opinion leaders as we are in our society, should be thinking about ways that we can nurture that idea and give it prominence and give it body and truth and feeling as often as we absolutely can.

The debate has been balanced, and it has been fair. Yes, I think and I hope that there is a strong support in this Legislative Assembly for the framework. I believe there is, judging by what members have said. At the same time, we haven't denied or dismissed, any of us, the opinions and the input of those people who feel differently about the framework. It isn't as though those have been pushed aside; they, too, have gained prominence. So I think another thing that distinguishes this debate is that it is balanced and that care was taken to address the other side of the issue, which I would argue is a quintessential Canadian thing to do, isn't it?

There are other issues. This is only the first step, and one of its strengths is that it hasn't been linked to a web of things that seem to fall apart, in past experience. There are a series of other issues, and I know that the Premier is engaged in dealing with some of those at the first ministers' level, and there are federal/provincial conferences at other levels that are looking at these. There are many groups and individuals across the country who have issues and who want them addressed in the context of the unity debate. This has not been precluded at all, and we in fact will be able to deal with those things as we go along.

One issue that I would like to mention in particular – because it has to be dealt with for the strength and good of this country and because it was raised in various ways in this debate – is the question of federal versus provincial powers. Some of the debate in here implied or in fact was very explicit about a desire to have federal powers eroded, and automatically a discussion of powers leads to some assumption that there should be a devolution of powers from the federal government to the provincial government. I do not accept that straight-line argument, and I think many Albertans do not accept that argument either. That a discussion of powers, as necessary as it is, automatically means a devolution of powers from the federal government to provincial governments is not something that I think is supported by many Albertans for some very good reasons. The most important reason is that if we are to have a strong Canada, if we are to find ourselves less often with the need to have debates like this, being driven to have debates like this to shore up something that is beginning to falter or fall apart, then we need to have a federal government that has sufficient strength to be a presence in bringing this country and holding this country together.

We can say that each of the 10 provinces can go on their own. I think we have to be very careful about that, and I think we all gain great strength and synergy from the fact that we are united as a country. I mention that because I think that will be an issue that will come to the fore over the next months and years as we continue to work on the strength of this country.

I'm not alone in saying that. In fact, I'd like to mention the reference in Mark Lisac's column in *The Journal* today to A Blueprint for National Economic Recovery, prepared by Ernest Manning and sent to former Premier Lougheed in this province. He mentions a number of recommendations, two of which are as follows: "develop constructive federal-provincial relations," and

“declare a three-year moratorium on confrontation between governments.” I think it is a very powerful statement that he makes in that, and I think we all have to be careful about choosing political battles, not just for the defence of the interests of Albertans but perhaps for the defence of the interests of political advantage. I think it's very clear that this country is eroded when we attack other provinces and the federal government, and I think we have to be very careful about how we conduct ourselves at that level.

I'd like to go on to reinforce the sentiments expressed by former Premier Manning and join my colleague the leader of the New Democratic Party in her recognition of the Canadian unity paper put together by the Royal Canadian Legion. Some members mentioned – in fact, the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, I think, indicated he had previously served in the armed forces. There's something particularly powerful about this document to me, because somehow people who have fought for this country would have a very special understanding of what its worth and its value are. It is to them as valuable as their lives were and are, and in this document I think is provided great leadership about the unity of this country and what should be at the basis of it. The Canadian Legion in its document says:

The Unity Committee agreed that a strong national government is essential to ensure the protection and development of a unified nation and that it must have authority over issues of national significance or the development of national standards.

Mr. Speaker, nothing that is great is built on parochial views, and nothing that is great is ever built on selfish positions. Strength comes not from what you get for yourself as much as it comes from what you're able to give to other people and what you gain from working with other people and enriching their lives. I don't want and I think Albertans don't want a country that is defined in terms of we/they. They want a country that is defined in terms of we, all of us.

The debate, as I said, isn't over, Mr. Speaker, and as powerful as the things that were said in this Legislature over the last three days are, we cannot stop now. Yes, there are a series of other issues that have to be dealt with, but I think the issue that was dealt with in this debate was the issue of the idea of Canada. And while we deal with powers and perhaps we deal with issues of constitutional reform sometime in the future, we specifically should always be dealing with the idea of Canada and communicating and speaking proudly and strongly about our heartfelt love for this country, as we expressed today in this Legislature. Let this not become unfamiliar. Let us use whatever opportunities we have to state these things over and over again, about how we feel this country is and how we value it and the worth that we place on this country.

3:40

We need some practical approaches to that. Education is obvious, and there are curriculums that deal with this. But perhaps it is that we can, when these other issues come up, have a concerted effort to do workshops and questionnaires, as we did this time, and have debate in the Legislature about these other issues in a concerted way, because that will continue to elevate the issue and the importance of Canada in Canadians' and Albertans' lives. Perhaps we have to extend and expand the kinds of exchanges that are now done, I think, on a limited basis for students. If I might offer, maybe we should make some effort to have exchanges for seniors, who can take the time to go to Quebec or go to the Maritimes and bring back their ideas and invite their friends from those areas back here. Perhaps even

MLAs could undertake to go to other parts of this country, as the Premier did when he went to Quebec. He took the case to Quebec just months ago, and he should be congratulated for that.

There is much that we can do, Mr. Speaker, and for us in this Legislature, for people across this country, I think we have a profound responsibility to Canada. Canada isn't, I would say, just another country. Canada is the beacon to the world for things that are good and decent and civil and dignified. Canada is a leader, a leader in the world simply by being what Canada and Canadians are. Let's remember that the real strength – the real strength – of this country comes not from what we have, the gifts that we have been given by God for having been lucky enough to be born here or for having been able to make the choice to come here. Let's remember that those tangibles aren't really what makes Canada great. What makes Canada great are the people of this country, the people of this country whose values and beliefs are at least partly captured in the Calgary framework.

Over the last three days we fulfilled a responsibility as Albertans and Canadians to address those values in positive terms. We did that, and I believe every Member of this Legislative Assembly should be congratulated for having done it. Let's remember that our work is not done and that Canada and being Canadian is a special responsibility and it is a special trust. I am very proud to be a Canadian.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Premier to close debate on Government Motion 23.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I, too, am very, very proud to be a Canadian. We all are.

As I move to close debate, may I first of all acknowledge and thank every Member of the Legislative Assembly for their comments these last three days. May I once again thank you, sir, and the leaders of the opposition parties, as well as my own Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs for the tremendous work that has been done in preparing for this historic and very significant debate.

Our task has been to relate the seven principles of the Calgary declaration to the feelings of our constituents, and those feelings have been varied, to say the least. Nonetheless, that was our task as we received those thoughts and those feelings through our public consultation process.

Mr. Speaker, I will be brief, because really the people have spoken. There is very little that I can add to what has already been said in this Chamber, but one thing has come through loud and clear: Albertans love their country. That has come through. Albertans believe that we can achieve equality while acknowledging diversity. Albertans have told us that there is an inner strength to this country, a strength that goes far beyond our written laws and what is said and done in our Parliament or our legislatures. That inner strength is found in the tolerance and compassion and equality of opportunity.

Albertans have told us that we governments and legislators, both federal and provincial, must do a better job of working cooperatively and demonstrating flexibility. I don't know if we can go so far as former Premier Manning suggested, to put a moratorium on confrontation, but we can try, because really the unfinished business on the public agenda demands no less.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have told us that they acknowledge a unique aspect to the Quebec society but in a way that unites us, not in a way that makes one Canadian better than another.

Yes, as I've listened to parts of the debate and as I've gone through *Hansard*, we must acknowledge and we have to acknowledge that many Albertans expressed deep concern about article 5 in the Calgary declaration. They voiced their concerns – some very, very loudly – about this element of the Calgary declaration. Many members of this Assembly voiced that concern in their debate, and they urged caution. I have heard that concern, Mr. Speaker.

I know that my commitment to Albertans is unshakeable. I've said it before many, many times, and I'll say it again: nothing will ever be agreed to by the government that could take away the equality of citizens or the equality of provinces. That is fundamental.

I remind all members and all Albertans that the Calgary declaration is a statement of principles. Once again, if any constitutional change is to come about, that change in this province can only take place through a referendum. Mr. Speaker, that is clear in policy. It is also a fact of law in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the values contained in the Calgary declaration are not new, but they are the things that Albertans cherish and the values that we must protect, and the coming months and years will test us once again. As I said in my comments to open debate, what we are doing here these last three days is a small but very important step into the future. The federation is not perfect. We all know that. Changes are coming, and we know that as well. In the not-too-distant future one part of this great Canadian family will be asked once again if Canada is good enough, if this beautiful country is good enough. In a small way what we have tried to do is to answer that question and to express to that member of this family that indeed we want them to remain part of the great Canadian family. We have asked Albertans in a broad, general kind of way for some guidance, some direction as we begin to confront the future. And I believe we have that guidance, not a blank cheque to rewrite the Constitution, which of course is the basic law of the land, but some clear direction that Albertans have certain principles that cannot be compromised in future constitutional discussions. We have listened.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition began his debate on Monday with a quote from George Brown, the dominant Liberal figure of another time. Well, let me close debate this historic day with a quote from Brown's contemporary and another great Canadian, Sir John A. Macdonald. He was asked in 1860, seven years before he realized his dream of a new nation, what he hoped to achieve. He replied: "one people, great in territory, great in resources, great in enterprise, great in credit, great in capital." Well, I believe that Macdonald's dream has come true. In a small way the Calgary declaration is a reaffirmation of that dream. So I will be voting in favour of the motion. I will be voting in favour of Canada.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion as proposed by the hon. Premier, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

May I invite you to continue standing as I ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strath-

cona to make their way to my dias and join me here. I invite them to lead the hon. the Premier, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the leader of the ND opposition, all members of this Assembly, and those in the galleries in the singing of our national anthem. Hon. members, please.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts, we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. members. Please be seated.

At this time I would like to acknowledge the work of staff, many of whom are rarely seen by members, who support the operations of the House.

Florence Marston of the Parliamentary Counsel office provides administrative support to the Private Bills Committee and to counsel in a broad range of activities including bill drafting. In the House services branch we have two administrative assistants to committees, Corinne Dacyshyn and Diane Shumyla, who support the committees of the Assembly as well as supporting the House operations. Jo-An Christiansen, our bills and *Journals* clerk, ensures among other things that House documents such as the Order Paper, Votes and Proceedings, and the *Journals* are produced in an accurate and timely manner. Janis Kiddie provides overall administrative support to the Clerk and to members in relation to their interparliamentary activities.

Behind the scenes on the 9th floor of the Annex are the staff of *Hansard*, led by Vivian Loosemore and supported by Carol Holowach, Deirdre Grist, Liz Sim, Jane Pickard, Madalyn Johnson, and Carol Delainey. This group, along with a sessional staff of input and copy editors, recordists, and messengers, work many hours after the House has adjourned to ensure that by 9 a.m. tomorrow all members will receive the *Hansard* of today's session.

In relation to those staff who are more visible to members, I want to acknowledge the work of the security staff, under the direction of the Sergeant-at-Arms, Brian Hodgson, and his Associate Sergeant, Mr. Al Gowler, who help ensure our security while we're in the House.

We need to recognize, as well, the work of our pages, who do an outstanding job of looking after our needs here in the Chamber.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the support that my office staff and the table officers provide to me, to members, and to all caucus staff in the operation of the House.

I would ask that all members of this Assembly remember all those members of the Assembly who may be ill over the ensuing holiday period.

I would now like to invite, as well, the hon. leader of the ND opposition to extend Christmas greetings and the best of the season to the citizens of Alberta if she so chooses.

MS BARRETT: Oh, this is a surprise, but thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my message would be to look after one another. You'll never replace family. Cherish them now and in the new year.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, would you care to extend best wishes?

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to extend best wishes to every Albertan during the holiday season and to express my clearest and my strongest sense to them of my hope that they have an excellent new year. I, like the New Democrat leader, understand that this period of time is a time for us to reflect on what we have, and it should be as much a time of celebration, of being together with family as it is a time of being very, very grateful for what we have in this place. All the best to all of you and all Albertans. Have a great holiday season and a great new year as well.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. the Premier, would you like to extend best wishes to the people of Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The vote today is a most fitting way to enter the festive season because it really exemplifies and expounds on the spirit of Christmas and Hanukkah: that spirit of togetherness; the spirit of family, albeit in a much larger sense; the spirit of brotherhood; and the spirit of goodwill. In that spirit, I wish all Albertans a very merry Christmas, a wonderful festive season, and a happy and healthy new year.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Assembly stands adjourned pursuant to the request for unanimous consent granted Monday, December 8, 1997.

To all, have a safe and joyeux Noël, happy Hanukkah, and the best of the season. May peace prevail.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4 p.m.]