

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, February 5, 1998 1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/02/05
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray:

From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Lord, grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented earlier this week be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring an administrative licence suspension which would suspend anyone charged with impaired driving, driving with a blood alcohol content over 0.08 or refusing to provide a breath or blood sample, for 90 days or up to the time of court appearance and disposition, whichever is the shorter period. The suspension would come into effect following a seven day temporary licensing period.

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

DR. MASSEY: With your permission I would ask that the petitions I presented on February 3 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.

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

MR. WHITE: As chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I hereby submit the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the First Session of the 24th Legislature. Copies shall be circulated to members following question period, sir.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to file a number of items. First, I am privileged to present an information bulletin, bookmark, and postcard promoting Random Acts of Kindness Week in all communities across Alberta from February 9 to 15.

This movement focuses on something that we can all participate in.

Secondly, I am pleased to file with the Legislative Assembly copies of letters I sent to two Albertans who were invested into the Order of Canada yesterday. Mr. Peter Harris of Lethbridge and Ms Alice Payne of Calgary were both named members of the Order of Canada for their outstanding contributions that have enriched the lives of all Albertans and Canadians.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table four copies of an incident investigation report made by occupational health and safety from Alberta Labour regarding the 46,000-litre spill of hydrochloric acid north of Red Deer last September.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'm very pleased to table four kits of information on the new Terra child and family support centre, now located at Braemar school. This is an excellent organization that works with teenage mothers.

I'd also like to table four copies of the B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality report, Gender Lens, a guide to gender-inclusive policy and program development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is my pleasure today to table with the Assembly four copies of the 1996-97 annual report of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Additional copies as required are available from my office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to file with the Assembly four copies of various expenses I've incurred, including committee claims, phone bills, that sort of thing.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table today four copies of a public statement by a group of concerned citizens and individuals that support ecotourism. They're operators in the Nordegg area. The report outlines the need to retain that area – it's west of the forestry trunk road – for tourism, recreation, wildlife, and watershed protection.

Thank you, sir.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table four copies of the statements on expenditures that I've incurred as MLA up to this point.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table an excerpt from the Special Places Provincial Co-ordinating Committee's report on the Castle region in which the committee makes recommendations to resolve conflicts between protection of the area and continuing commitments to existing tenure holders.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from 10 U.S. and Canadian wildlife biologists that expresses concern about the high mortality of grizzly bears and wolves in southwestern Alberta and explains that the narrow corridor that includes the Castle region is essential for the long-term survival of grizzly bears.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure and pride that I introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly some 19 bright, energetic young grade 6 students from the Rocky Christian school along with three parents and their teacher, Mr. Mark McWhinnie. The parents are Mr. Robert Boodt, Mrs. Kathy Smid, and Mrs. Margaret Bouwman. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they would rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly three folks up in the members' gallery: Mrs. Marie Anstey, her daughter Michelle, and son Bradley. Marie is a board member of the Parkland school division as well as on the region 8 steering committee for the redesign of services for children and families. Michelle is a grade 7 student in High Park school, and I might add, an honour student. She was here last year and enjoyed her visit, so she came back to see how we do business this year. Bradley is also a student at High Park school, and his love is basketball and other athletics. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you today 17 visitors from Canterbury Foundation in our city. This is on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview. They are seated in the gallery, and I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly eight members of local 312A of the United Food & Commercial Workers who are currently on strike at Maple Leaf Foods. They are in the members' gallery. With your permission I would ask that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

1:40

Oral Question Period

Video Lottery Terminals

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Treasurer for demonstrating the courage to agree publicly with the Liberals that VLTs are wrong and that we don't need the money to run the province. But now there is a split between the Premier and the Treasurer over VLTs. The Premier says that the government needs the VLT money; the Treasurer says on the front page of the *Calgary Herald* this morning that it doesn't. The Premier says that he supports VLTs; the Treasurer says that he doesn't personally like them. To the Premier: has the Premier forced the Treasurer to accept the government's VLT policy against his conscience, or has the Treasurer decided upon that himself?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no split, believe me. VLTs, like any other form of gambling – it's a matter of personal choice. No one is forced to go into any bar or lounge or casino to play a VLT. I was asked the question by the news media if I feel morally bad or if I feel I've done something sinful if I go in and drop some coins in a VLT. I said no, and I don't. I don't think that I have to go home and pray and beg for forgiveness for putting a coin in a VLT. That is a matter of personal choice.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that many in this room, including Liberals, have put coins in VLTs or slot machines, either here in Edmonton or other places in Alberta or perhaps in Las Vegas. Do they feel morally upset about this? Do they feel that they have committed a sin? Maybe the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition can answer that question. When he puts a coin in a slot machine, does he feel like he has committed a sin? I don't think so.

MR. MITCHELL: I guess, then, Mr. Speaker, it might just be a question of hypocrisy.

Who is right, the Premier who says that the government needs the money to run the province or the Provincial Treasurer who says very, very, clearly that the budget won't be shaken without these video slot machine revenues? How can you take the money when the Treasurer himself says that you don't need it? Who do we believe?

MR. KLEIN: Believe both of us. Mr. Speaker, I can say today that the government caucus approved unanimously the concept of a summit to examine all issues of gambling.

MR. MITCHELL: Why don't you do one on education? Why don't you do one on health care?

MR. KLEIN: The question, if that can be construed as a supplementary, was: why did we not do it on health care and why did we not do it on education? Well, indeed we did. There were extensive roundtables and public consultation on both health care and on education.

I would like to have a summit, perhaps one or two days, to examine all the issues relative to gambling, including the question of VLTs and the question of bingos and the question of casino gambling and all forms of legalized gambling in this province. Certainly part of this is the revenue and what effect it would have on the provincial budget if those revenues were lost, what the whole impact on communities and cultural organizations and art organizations would be, the issue as it relates to addiction – the moral issue, yes, is an issue that needs to be discussed – the whole issue relative to gray machines, if you eliminate legalized

gambling, the extent to which it is driven underground, the problems, then, that the police have to face. All of these issues, Mr. Speaker.

I have said publicly that certainly there will have to be involvement by government members. We have had one of our MLAs, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, very involved in doing studies and surveys on this. There is a commitment, Mr. Speaker, to review the whole situation relative to lottery gambling before the end of September. This is all part of the process, so let it all unfold.

There is the question, of course, of municipal plebiscites. All I want to do is to achieve a balanced approach. Indeed there will be a member of our caucus involved, and I would invite the opposition Liberals to send a representative of their caucus to this particular summit to have a good, sound, reasoned, unemotional discussion on this issue, not just VLTs but gambling generally, Mr. Speaker, all gambling.

MR. MITCHELL: After three years of consultation on this issue the Premier is still trying to find some group somewhere that will tell him what he wants to hear, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the Premier simply stop that diversionary tactic, stop all the distractions, and have a plebiscite across this province so that the people of Alberta can resolve the clear split between the Premier and the Treasurer and make the decision themselves on this issue? Just call a plebiscite.

MR. KLEIN: Here we see another contradiction. Only a few short days ago the leader of the Liberal opposition was saying: with a stroke of my pen just get rid of all VLTs. Right? Now he is saying: let's have a provincewide plebiscite.

Mr. Speaker, I suspect there will be a number of plebiscites throughout this province. As you know, in the city of Calgary the council has agreed to a plebiscite contingent on enough names on the petition to ask council for a plebiscite. I would suspect that city council here in Edmonton will be taking action. Some municipalities have already taken action. I would assume that other municipalities throughout this province will be taking action relative to plebiscites on this particular issue.

The forum certainly will be an education forum, and it will also feed into the decision-making process relative to not only the issue of VLTs but gambling in general.

MR. DAY: Supplementary information too. The opposition leader keeps referring to a split between the Treasurer and the Premier. You know, the article to which he refers was very accurate in its reporting. What the member did not mention was that I said that there will be a significant drop in revenues if indeed every VLT stopped and there was no more money coming in.

I also said that it would not shake this government's business plan, not the one-year budget or the three-year budget. And do you know why? For the same reason, Mr. Speaker, that I've said that the low oil prices right now are not going to shake our budget plan or our process, nor is the difficulty in Asia going to shake our budget plan or that process. Why is that? Because we are prudently and carefully managing all the resources that come into this economy. And we're going to continue to do that. We will not be shaken by these things.

He makes a reference about liking or disliking VLTs. That's a personal issue. The fact that I don't like to gamble does not make me any better or any worse than anybody else. But I also

do support choice. In our community, in Red Deer, just a few years ago when the question of Sunday shopping came up, I was not a promoter of Sunday shopping, but it went to the people to vote, and the people in Red Deer said: we want Sunday shopping. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? We're all still friends in Red Deer. We don't look any better or any worse on one another. There are also some Liberals I don't particularly like, but I'm not going to come up with a law putting them out of commission.

1:50

Special Places 2000

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the Growth Summit survey indicated that Albertan's ranked our natural environment as the top factor contributing to the quality of life in this province. In the past, as is indicated in this letter of April 1993, the Premier has made a strong commitment to protecting special places in this province. Unfortunately, the current minister of the environment does not share that commitment. Will the Premier insist that his minister of the environment stop oil and gas developments on designated special places like Fort Assiniboine and the Rumsey sites, and will he do it now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, in a broad sense we have committed to Special Places 2000. As a matter of fact, when I was the minister of the environment, that commitment was made in front of the Duke of Edinburgh and the president of the World Wildlife Fund.

The minister and his department are moving with, I think, great speed to designate the required number of sites to achieve whatever we committed to at that meeting, I believe in 1992. I believe it is 12 percent. With that I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the program Special Places 2000 is a made-in-Alberta program. It will meet the goals of the commitment that was made in 1993. That fact is that when we are finished, we will have representative samples of all of the six major ecoregions in the province as well as the subregions, the 20 of them. So we will have representative samples of all of those regions in the protected spaces program.

Mr. Speaker, currently we have a number that I know the hon. Leader of the Opposition doesn't want to recognize. Under our current IRP system we have zone 1 in many of them. Those are very protected areas, and unfortunately he and some of his colleagues don't want to recognize that.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, we'll have special places perhaps, but you won't be able to see them for the gas wells.

In order to get the oil and gas leases off designated special places in this province, will the Premier direct his minister to provide alternative leases or, for example, use royalty credits so that we can protect the integrity of these special places?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the minister is doing all that is required to protect these special places in the spirit of the program Special Places 2000. Again, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. When we set out on this project, we said that we would honour current commitments. There were a number of oil and gas leases that were sold a number of years ago. Through things like directional drilling, today many of those resources can be accessed without building a well site within the protected area.

MS CARLSON: What about Rumsey?

MR. LUND: Oh, I'm glad the hon. member mentions Rumsey, because in fact in Rumsey there are a number of oil and gas wells currently. They were there. Because of the configuration of the well sites, there is no area within the Rumsey site that will require a new well site. Every one of them can be built on existing sites, and with directional drilling all of the minerals can be accessed.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier say that his minister is honouring the spirit of the special places program when he is allowing oil and gas and other commercial development potentially on sites like Fort Assiniboine and Rumsey and when he extended the lease on Rumsey after he had created it as a special place? It's a question of hypocrisy.

MR. KLEIN: It's not a question of hypocrisy. It's a question of the minister doing the right thing in the spirit of sustainable development, Mr. Speaker, and in the spirit of complying with the parameters for the Special Places 2000 program.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister has already given an answer with respect to Rumsey, but again I will have him supplement.

MR. LUND: For the second time, Mr. Speaker, within the Rumsey area there will be no new well sites. Every lease can be . . .

MS CARLSON: They're already there.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, if you persist in throwing questions to the hon. minister, I'll have no choice but to extend the opportunity to the hon. minister to respond to all questions. Please do so.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that latitude.

As far as the Assiniboine situation is concerned, there were leases sold in that area many years ago, and there has now been some activity and desire to access those minerals. If in fact there are any leases that fall within the parameters of that designation, they will be under very strict regulations. The ground rules are very, very stringent, and we are going to force the companies, wherever possible, to use directional drilling and establish outside of the designated area.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The special places process in the Castle area in southern Alberta is an example of what's wrong with the entire process. This area is an important north/south wildlife corridor that's essential for our vulnerable grizzly population. However, the local special places committee says that it's business as usual in a forest land use zone, which means that really anything goes. My questions are to the Minister of Environmental Protection. How can an area that will still have oil wells, logging, grazing, and off-road vehicles be considered a special place?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I find very offensive the comments the hon. member made relative to the hardworking people in Pincher Creek that sat on the committee and spent hundreds of hours developing the plan. To say that it's business as usual is so far from the truth it's pathetic. The fact is that there are many areas in that large area that will not be accessible to oil and gas and

logging and the things that she mentions. Yes, there will be some trails; yes, there's currently a lot of use in that area. But the trails will be very designated; they will be monitored closely. In fact, we are now putting some regulation in that will implement the access management plan that the good people of Pincher Creek spent, once again, hundreds of hours two and three years ago to design. Now we are going to be implementing that plan.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're the minister of the environment for the whole province. It's a provincial resource.

When will this minister listen to the 1993 recommendations of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, the thousands of petitions, and hundreds of signatures that requested that the Castle area be properly protected?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the Natural Resources Conservation Board recommendations in 1992 were to mitigate the effect of a very large development in that area. That's what the hearing was all about. The board said that we needed to develop this wildland area in order to mitigate the effects of the development. The development did not go ahead, so to now bring up the old report and say that it has a lot of relevance is just simply not the case.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, is the minister, then, prepared to listen to the recent letter from the 10 prominent biologists who have told the minister that there is a concern about the extinction of grizzlies in that area? Will you listen to them?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals start getting their kissin' cousins in Ottawa to listen to what the biologists are saying relative to grizzly bears in Jasper national park and Banff national park, then perhaps we can look at this.

THE SPEAKER: ND opposition question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:00

Provincial Budget

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One week from today after question period the Provincial Treasurer will rise in this Assembly to outline the government's financial plan in the annual Budget Address and to table the related documents. He will agree with me that this is without doubt the most important single set of documents presented yearly during the spring session of this Legislature for it sets out both the fiscal plan of the government as well as details of every category of its expenditures. My question is to the hon. Treasurer. How can the Treasurer justify presenting a document as important as the budget on a Thursday afternoon before a long weekend, thereby doing the most unimaginable thing possible; that is, denying all members of this Assembly the opportunity to debate the budget in the House for five long days?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I hate to use the phrase that's the way it's always been done, because I'm always open to change when change is appropriate.

The other criticism that I've run into in the past, as we do at certain times, is that in fact when we table something, we move right into debate and we don't allow opportunity for people to take it, give it some reasoned thought, and then begin the debate. You know, it just goes to show that it's hard to please everybody all the time.

There's going to be a good period of time to give full consider-

ation to that budget, and I'll take his request under advisement and talk to my caucus colleagues and see if next year – 9 o'clock Monday morning. Is that a better time? I don't know. We try and meet as many needs as we can, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the unfortunate timing of the Budget Address, on a Thursday afternoon before a long weekend, will the Treasurer follow the lead of the federal government and every other provincial and territorial government and allow opposition members to review the budget documents on a strict embargo basis on terms similar to those followed by the news media, and if not, why not?

MR. DAY: I'd hate for it to look like we trust the media and we don't trust the opposition, Mr. Speaker. That's not the suggestion at all.

It's a novel idea that's coming forward, and I'll take it under consideration. I have brought ideas, actually, to the federal government, the federal Liberals; for instance, a legislated debt pay-down plan, which is far more important than who you're going to lock up for a couple hours before a budget comes out. So there is always this mutual exchange of ideas. I appreciate that suggestion and will take a look at it.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary: given that the Treasurer well knows that the greatest public attention is paid to the budget in the first hours after it's presented and given the sheer volume of information that makes up the budget document . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

DR. PANNU: Here it is. How can the Treasurer justify being the only jurisdiction in the country with a policy of denying opposition members an opportunity to make informed comments on the budget immediately after its release?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the legislative process is set up so that there are literally days and days of debate, hours and hours of debate on the budget and the estimates. Very soon after tabling the budget, I'm to appear before the Public Accounts Committee. The estimates of Treasury come up, I think, the following week. Again, not wanting to make the media feel too special, but we try and actually time our budget speech so that the media has full access to some immediate publication so that the people of Alberta are not waiting.

He's talking about Thursday afternoon and a long weekend. I know for myself and my colleagues – I understand that Monday's a holiday. Thursday sure isn't. Thursday night sure isn't. Friday isn't. Saturday isn't. And I know a lot of people in Alberta who are working the whole time too. So I'm happy they can enjoy a lot of time off. We'll have plenty of time, hours and hours and days and days in this Assembly and outside of the Assembly, to look at the budget.

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

Air Ambulance Services

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Health. Nearly two years ago it was noted in question period in this Assembly by the then

Minister of Health that air dispatch protocol for helicopters for time-dependent, life-threatening emergencies was generally considered most effective in a range of about 125 kilometres because of speed and refueling. In recent years newer rotary aircraft have an effective range well in excess of 200 kilometres. To the minister: when will this outdated dispatch protocol be revised?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly the member is correct in that the nature of rotary aircraft is being improved. I suppose, without meaning to sound facetious, that if we were to have one of the new armed forces rotary aircraft, we could probably fly in from Fort Vermilion in terms of the capability of the helicopter.

The protocols that are being referred to in the chart of call have a number of factors involved in them. Yes, the range of the aircraft or the helicopter, the time elapsed for the aircraft to come from base and pick up an injured person and go back, as opposed to a ground ambulance that is near the site. There are a number of other factors involved.

In direct answer to the question, Mr. Speaker, given that there are a number of factors that have to be considered, we do have our ambulance advisory committee in Alberta Health, chaired by my colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul, looking at this particular matter. They are reviewing the chart of call procedures and outlines, and once the recommendations are forthcoming, we will certainly be looking at them seriously and dealing with them.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, again, my supplementary is to the Minister of Health. Given the statement that the minister has given, when will a new chart of call, then, be approved by the committee and when will it be brought into effect?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to just add further to this question and to my first answer that we do have a number of different contractors across the province. We have the emergency physicians. We do have to check with people with expertise and experience in the area of air ambulance. As I've indicated, it is currently a matter that is under review. The advisory committee, as I said, chaired by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, will be considering these submissions and will have these meetings as quickly as possible. We have no desire to delay on this matter. We just want to make a sound decision. I do not have a definite date, but I would certainly think that it will not be very long before we can revise or look at revising the chart of call.

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

Special Places 2000

(continued)

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A major problem with the special places program is the power the minister has given to local committees that don't see the overall picture of a province-wide network of protected areas. They don't see the overall picture of the provincewide need for a network. A December report on the Castle area from the provincial co-ordinating committee identified the distinction between the local committee focus to provide a local perspective and the provincial committee's recommendations based on their mandate to implement the vision of special places, which has a broad provincial perspective. Why is the Minister of Environmental Protection refusing to take a

provincial perspective on special places, which was recommended by the provincial co-ordinating committee?

2:10

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, if this hon. member can find evidence that we are not looking at the bigger picture, I would like her to present it, because in fact we set up a provincial co-ordinating committee that makes sure that the big picture is looked at. They pass that information on to the local committee to make sure that they are completely aware of the bigger picture. Quite frankly, I guess what she's saying is that local people don't know what they're doing, and that is, I think, very insulting.

MS CARLSON: What I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is: why can't the minister just adopt the provincial committee's recommendations and make proper protection of all special places, especially the Castle area, a major priority for him and his government?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, this government believes in public consultation. The hon. member is saying that we draw together 15 people and then we bless them and they go off and they do whatever they like and forget about the public, the people out there in the communities. As long as I am minister, the local people will have a lot to say about what happens in their area.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, this minister suggested that I provide him with more information about what's going on out there. Will he now agree to meet with all of those environmental groups so that he can know what's going on, which he has refused to do for these past two years?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I haven't refused to meet with anyone. But it's very interesting. The very groups that she's talking about put out a press release saying that they're not going to have anything to do with any committee we set up. So I don't know. What's the problem?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Hon. members, though, it would probably be more appropriate instead of saying "she" and "he," why not "hon. member?" There's a lot of honour in here.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Health Information Management

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health. I'm aware of the extensive consultations and ongoing planning that continues to take place with regard to a health information system for Alberta. I understand that in the 1997 federal budget \$150 million was set aside over a three-year period to develop a national strategy to establish a Canadian health information system. To the minister: does our participation in this national strategy delay our getting on with creating our own health information system?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, no. This federal initiative will not delay the major effort that we are making in terms of developing Wellnet or a health information system. The effort of the federal government is operating in parallel to that of this province and many others. One of the initiatives of the federal government is holding an IT conference relative to health, which will be commencing here in Edmonton this coming weekend. At that

conference it is the desire of the federal government and the host government, Alberta, and all the provinces to look at priority areas for information technology infrastructure which will benefit the patients, the people using the health care system across Alberta and across Canada.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the minister: if health information management is important to our health system, would the minister please explain why and when Albertans can expect to see some benefits from this strategy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as the member may be aware – and I think, having an interest in this area, he certainly is – we are moving ahead steadily with the development of our overall Wellnet initiative. However, we want to do it right. We want to involve many stakeholders that are affected in the process, and it will probably take some period of time before the Wellnet is fully introduced.

We also, of course, want to make sure that patient information is protected, that there is no doubt there about the security of patient information. So we are working methodically on the related legislation. I do hope that in certain areas, such as the tracking and management of pharmaceuticals and the implementation of, perhaps, telehealth projects, we'll be able to move ahead with this within perhaps a year.

MR. HERARD: My final supplemental to the minister: with easier access to health information, how are we going to protect personal health information from being used for the wrong purposes, given that our protection of privacy act does not extend to the private sector?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we are very much aware of that issue, very much committed to making sure that individual privacy is protected in this overall effort. We have an overall steering committee established to review and look at the input that's been received in response to the initial bill that was introduced in the Assembly last session. One of the things that we're certainly looking is to make sure that this legislation fits with the FOIP legislation. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that perhaps the needed legislation can be integrated into the FOIP legislation rather than being a separate bill. We're looking at that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Forest Management

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the special places program it seems that local groups have the last word in the management of the area. However, in the Nordegg region, which happens to be in the member's own backyard, which is not a special place by the way, there's a local group who's come forward with a proposal for the economic, sustainable management and protection of the forest area, but in fact they're being totally and completely ignored. To the Minister of Environmental Protection: why are you ignoring the locals on one hand, your locals, your local people, when in fact you've just completed saying that we respect a great deal the import of the local input? Why is it one way there and a different way here?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, nobody is ignoring the Nordegg group. Nobody. As a matter of fact, I met with representatives

already, personally. We've had our staff at a public meeting. I, as a matter of fact, just about two weeks ago phoned to try to arrange a meeting where I could meet with these folks.

There's an issue that has developed. It takes a little bit of history. Back in the '70s the province put together a consultative process and eventually ended up with the eastern slopes policy. They took that policy and then refined it down to a more local level. Once again, a very open, public process. It ended up with what's known as the IRPs, and within the IRP the area the hon. member is talking about was zone 5. Zone 5 in the IRPs is a multi-use area, and based on that, the government did issue some quotas for timber in the area we're talking about. That happened back in the '80s. Those were purchased from the government in good faith. The government made that decision based on the public consultation that had gone on prior to that.

Oil and gas is another permitted use in zone 5. Those leases were sold based on the good faith of the government at the time.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, on the area in question, Mr. Minister, not the area that you're talking about in zone 5, why did you allow your forestry division just recently to work with the industry behind closed doors to allocate more FMAs without consulting those in the area that rely on this particular area for important ecosystem and ecotourism activities?

2:20

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd make an offer to the hon. member. If he wants to come to my office, we will explain to him the difference between permits, quotas, and FMAs. The fact is that we did not allocate more timber. What happened – and we're doing it all over the province. Where a company has an FMA and they have a quota embedded within that FMA, we are rolling the quota into the FMA. Why? Because under an FMA there is a requirement for a public advisory committee. There is the necessity before any cutting plans are approved that there be public consultation, and they have to be out for public scrutiny.

In the case of these three FMAs that are in question and that the hon. member is talking about – there are three of them – we are going to insist that a member from the Nordegg group be on the public advisory committees of those management areas. The fact is that by rolling the quota in, those people have got much, much more input into what has happened. We have to work out a mechanism where the cutting can be sequenced, where it can be done so that it does not adversely affect the other users in the area.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously knows that ecotourism requires an ecosystem that's in place, not an area that has been cut. Will the minister impose a moratorium on these logging activities at least west of the forestry trunk road in order to set up some kind of in-depth process? Not the FMA process; that is a given that the trees will be cut. Would you please do that? Just that.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member feels that ecotourism cannot survive and flourish and, as a matter of fact, expand where there has been cutting, I would like him to explain: how is it that in areas like Hinton, that has had an FMA for over 35 years – how is it that the ecotourism system is expanding in that area? How is it that around Edson, where we have a number of companies and a lot of cutting, how come up around Grande Prairie it's increasing? There are ways and means that we can make sure that the operations of ecotourism can survive and, in

fact, flourish and still have the oil and gas and the forestry activity.

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

Film and Television Industry

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt that our national economy is strong, and the economy in Alberta is stronger than anywhere else in Canada. We can be very proud of that. But there are certain sectors of our economy, particularly the film and television industry, which are not thriving as well as they are in other provinces. This is following their very direct submission to the Growth Summit identifying some of the concerns within their industry. My question this afternoon is to the minister responsible for science, research, and technology. I would like to have you indicate to the members of this Assembly the economic status of the film and television industry and identify to the House just how serious their decline is.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta, like Canada, had an increase in the film and television business of about 10 to 15 percent a year. This occurred until 1996 in Alberta, where the total value of the film and television business was about \$150 million. In 1997 the total value of the television and film production industry in Alberta was reduced to \$50 million. This happened in Alberta when in fact there were increases across other provinces.

MRS. BURGNER: My second question to the same minister: given those significant drops in revenues, how do you account for the production increases in other jurisdictions versus Alberta?

DR. TAYLOR: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, other jurisdictions in fact offered direct grants and loan guarantees to certain television and film production companies. As well, they created tax policy that was appropriate to the television and film industry as well as all high knowledge intensive industries.

This province and this government will not pick winners and losers by offering direct grants or direct loan guarantees to any company or any individual industry. However, we are committed as a government to creating the most tax competitive environment in Canada, and we will work towards that.

MRS. BURGNER: My final question to the same minister: given that the film industry has not asked for tax credits, are there any plans in your department to address this issue and encourage some reinvestment in this significant industry?

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. I think one of the things we have to recognize with knowledge-intensive industries, which includes the film business, is that there are two things that are important, people and capital. Both of these things are very mobile. They are not like traditional industries that we have in Alberta, like the oil patch, where you simply can't move the oil to another province to develop.

My department is working on a generic tax program that would be appropriate to knowledge-intensive industries. This would not pick the film industry, for instance. It would not pick the biotechnology industry. But it would apply to all high knowledge based industries. It would not include grants. It would not include loan guarantees. It would not pick particular companies. However, we would cause a generic policy that would cause

companies to invest in jobs, invest in projects before there would be any benefit to them. Within the next several weeks, Mr. Speaker, I will be bringing this proposal forward for discussion.

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

Special Places 2000

(continued)

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Castle area is not the only location where local committee recommendations could jeopardize a special places designation. Similar problems are occurring in the Whaleback, the largest remaining piece of unspoiled montane landscape in Canada if not in the world. To the minister of economic protection: does the minister agree with the 1994 decision of the ERCB not to permit Amoco to drill for oil in the Whaleback because of the area's potential as a special place?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, would you just indicate which minister the question is being directed to? There was such excitement with the previous question's results.

MS PAUL: It's to the Environmental Protection minister.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There was a proposal to drill a well in the Whaleback some time back. Under the EUB, the ERCB at that time, a decision was made not to grant the licence. Currently it is my understanding that there are no applications before the board, none that I'm aware of.

MS PAUL: My second question is to the same minister. Does the minister think the area, the last piece of unspoiled montane in Canada, will be protected if oil and gas activities and logging are allowed to proceed?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's completely hypothetical. As I indicated, as far as I know there are no applications to drill any wells.

MS PAUL: To the same minister: will the minister at least direct the provincial co-ordinating committee to focus on the provincial perspective when completing the network of protected areas rather than allowing economic development, as proposed by the local committee?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I do not have any local committee recommendations. I'm not sure what the hon. member is getting at. As I indicated earlier, we set up the provincial co-ordinating committee to make sure that the bigger picture was addressed, and they passed that information on down to the local committee. I think that has already been done.

THE SPEAKER: I've had a request from a member of Executive Council, in this case the Minister of Labour, wishing to supplement an answer given in an earlier question period.

2:30 Hydrochloric Acid Vapour Leak

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar tabled the incident report

questioned yesterday. He was reading selectively from it. The question was:

Since the Alberta fire code requires that an inspector be notified . . . why did your department not identify this serious problem?

We did examine the question, as promised to the House. There is no requirement in the fire code to notify an inspector when tanks stored outside and containing this type of material are leased or relocated. It's contrary to the member's interpretation.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals should know, although they don't represent, the city of Red Deer is an accredited municipality responsible for the fire code within its boundaries. The Red Deer fire marshal had a complete awareness of the events, and the investigation of this incident did not identify any fire code violation.

The third part of the question, Mr. Speaker. The member knows, I'm sure, that Alberta Labour has a good office representation in Red Deer. Its Red Deer staff investigated this event, and there would be no associated costs for that investigation.

Mr. Speaker, I can only apologize to the House for taking time to correct erroneous impressions by the opposition.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Under our administrative practices, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, when a member of Executive Council provides a delayed response, there's an opportunity for the individual with whom the exchange first was to raise one supplementary question. You now have an opportunity to do such if you wish.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I would like to ask the Minister of Labour. October 1 last year, after this incident, a spokesperson from his department acknowledged that his department does not have the personnel to provide safety inspections on every work site in this province. That happened in this situation just immediately north of the city of Red Deer. Can he tell the House today if he's going to fix that problem and put more inspectors in the field in his department so this problem doesn't happen again?

MR. SMITH: A related question? Thanks for your guidance on that, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, in the careful scrutiny of the business plan which I know the member will want to take further and is looking forward to the next set of business plans, he has seen the competence in the private sector. He's seen the competence of those who work in the private sector, work in partnership with a government that will not take the Liberal route of overburdening and overregulating a free market.

In fact, that's exactly what's happening. These industries are growing at phenomenal rates. They're growing in a free market environment. They're growing with the opportunity to participate with new profits under a record of the most safe circumstances in the history of Alberta, the lowest recorded injuries in the history of Alberta per working day. I think that the policy is indeed a matter of the record.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: I've been advised there are three members' statements today. We'll proceed first of all with a statement from the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, to be followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Community Lottery Boards

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to publicly identify and thank 44 municipalities and 63 individuals. What I'm talking about, colleagues, are the 44 co-operating municipalities who work through the recommended process, publicly recruited, and have now appointed members to their community lottery regional boards. I also want to thank the 63 individuals who applied and are the successful applicants who will be volunteering their time, talent, and expertise. Region 15: MD of Lesser Slave Lake, Slave Lake. Region 20: Barrhead, county of Barrhead. Region 23: county of Smoky Lake, Smoky Lake, Vilna, Warspite, and Wabasca. Region 41: Milk River, Warner, Raymond, Coutts, county of Warner, Stirling. Number 53: Edberg, Rosalind, New Norway, Ferintosh, county of Camrose, Bittern Lake, Bawlf, Bashaw, Hay Lakes. Number 59: Big Valley, Botha, county of Stettler, Donald, Gadsby, Rochon Sands, Stettler, White Sands. Region 60: Castor, Halkirk, Coronation, and county of Paintearth. Region 61: Carstairs, county of Mountain View, Cremona, Didsbury, Olds, and Sundre. Region 64: Drumheller, MD of Badlands.

I want to thank them for working so expeditiously on what we believe to be a very good program. On April 1 we will have allocated \$50 million, and I do thank these municipalities for working with us to ensure that we have this program up and running. I will certainly be letting you know as the other paperwork comes in. I know that many communities are working on this as we speak.

Thank you.

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

Maple Leaf Foods Inc.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has once again let down the city of Edmonton and northern Alberta's hog processors by his government's inaction in the Maple Leaf strike. It is extremely unfortunate that this government failed to play a constructive role as an active facilitator in resolving the dispute between Maple Leaf Foods and the workers at the former Gainers' plant.

The government's suggestion that it is a disinterested observer in this dispute is wrong. The province owns the land and the buildings and receives over \$200,000 in annual lease revenue for the operation of this facility. In addition, the taxpayers invested \$209 million in this facility, contrary to what the minister of public works may think.

This government and the Premier in particular failed to protect the interests of the Maple Leaf workers. The Premier broke a promise he made on February 23, 1993. The Premier said then that the workers had nothing to fear if Alberta sold the money-losing meat packing plant. He said his plan would be designed to make sure the plant remains viable and open. The Premier appears to be doing nothing about this broken promise.

The Premier also violated a number of the objectives that his government established in facilitating the sale of Gainers in November 1993, including to further the development of an Alberta-based and -directed, internationally competitive pork processing industry with maximum value-adding for the province, to consider the interests of Gainers' employees, and to maximize the realization from the province's interests. Clearly none of these objectives were achieved. The lack of leadership by this government on the Maple Leaf dispute cost this city 950 jobs with a direct annual payroll of \$45 million.

The government should provide full disclosure of any and all agreements between the government of Alberta, its agents, and Maple Leaf. I believe the people of Edmonton and Alberta have a right to see the amended base agreement respecting the property, billing, and equipment at the Maple Leaf Edmonton site.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Anne Falk

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today many Edmontonians, friends, and staff of the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, MCN, come to pay their last respects to a special lady and a great friend, Anne Falk. The first time I met Anne I found her at work well past the time she could have gone home. That was an indication of what a tireless, dedicated person Anne was.

Anne Falk was born on October 6, 1936, and she was involved with the Mennonite Central Committee, MCC, service from 1966 to 1998, over 30 years of her life. She became involved when she worked as a nurse in Vietnam in 1966. From 1972 until 1978 she served two terms of MCC service in Indonesia. Anne then came to the city of Edmonton, which was this community's good fortune. She began to volunteer her time assisting many immigrants with their problems. She was instrumental in assisting with setting up the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, MCN, in 1982.

For those of you who may not be familiar, the MCN goal is to help immigrants and refugees settle in Canada. This group dates back to 1978, when the Mennonite church saw the desperate need of numerous southeast Asian refugees who were fleeing the political turmoil in Vietnam. Anne worked for the MCN as a resource person and as a settlement counsellor from 1981 to 1998. She was the first person able to transcend the cultural and language barriers. Anne's qualifications as a nurse, her knowledge of the Vietnamese language, and her experience in Vietnam enabled her to assist the people who needed help. To illustrate her workload, during the first year of operation, in 1981, there were 2,611 contacts with clients by a staff of only 1.5, an average of 328 per month. Anne witnessed the growth of the MCN to the present-day staff of 56 and a volunteer base of 75 people.

The MCN motto is based on I John 3:18: our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love which shows itself in action. I believe Anne's life truly exemplified this motto.

May she rest in peace.

2:40 Projected Government Business

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Orders I would request that the Deputy Government House Leader reveal the government's agenda for next week.

AN HON. MEMBER: More good government.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker, next week we'll engage in more good government.

On Monday, February 9, we expect to proceed to second reading on bills 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, and 14 in the afternoon and then replies to the Speech from the Throne. In the evening the same order of business as has not been previously dealt with and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, February 10, at 4:30 we would proceed with second reading on Bill 15 and then as per the Order Paper and in the evening, after 8 o'clock, Committee of the Whole on bills 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, February 11, in the evening we'll follow the same order of progress as on Tuesday, and in consultation with the opposition, with respect to such business as we might proceed with but Committee of the Whole primarily on items not otherwise dealt with.

Then, of course, on February 12 we'll proceed after 4 p.m. with the Budget Address.

head: **Statement by the Speaker
Flags in the Chamber**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on next Thursday, February 12 – and this is a bit of information I wish to provide to all members – we have Members' Statements followed by the Budget Address. Coming out of and arising out of the unity debate that occurred in December in this Legislature were a lot of very fine ideas. The resolution that came out was a unanimous one.

In reading the text and listening to the speeches given by various individuals, one suggestion was that what we do not have in this Assembly are the flags of the other jurisdictions within Canada, other than the national flag and the provincial flag. So next Thursday, February 12, when hon. members arrive in this Assembly, they will find, on a temporary basis, the flags of the other provinces plus the two territories of Canada on stage in that corner of the Assembly. The plan will be to have these other flags directed and put in on a permanent basis on the north side of the Assembly just underneath the railing. We'll become the first Legislature in Canada to recognize our commitment to this country, as was expressed in that particular thing.

The reason I raise this with you is that Flag Day in Canada is Sunday the 15th of this month, and one hon. member has already advised me that in terms of a member's statement for next Thursday, he will be talking about the importance of the flag.

Next weekend, of course, is a busy one: Valentine's Day on Saturday and Flag Day on Sunday and Family Day on Monday. And who knows what else? Did I get them all?

MR. MAR: We'll squeeze the budget in.

THE SPEAKER: Yeah. The budget we conclude with, of course, on Thursday the 12th, but the flags will be here and on all members' desks next Thursday. There will be a small Canadian flag as well.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Consideration of His Honour
head: the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Coutts moved:

That an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable H.A. "Bud" Olson, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Debate adjourned February 4]

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to reply to the Speech from the Throne. I guess I can appreciate the paper it was written on and the buzzwords that were in it and the message it was trying to get out, but what I find missing is maybe a little bit of heart with this Speech from the Throne, a lot of heart. I've been in here a few years now, and there were some things that I was looking for. Sadly, to me they were missing. I want to talk about a few things that should have been addressed.

When I go around to classrooms in my constituency, I describe, you know, government members, opposition members, and I say, "Now, if you were elected to be a critic," which is what I am elected to be, "what things would you . . ." [interjections] Regretfully – regretfully – I'm elected to be a critic, but that is my job, and I do it to the best of my ability, much to the chagrin of the Treasurer, I am sure. I love to wake them up on a Thursday afternoon, Mr. Speaker. However, one of the things the kids always say is: oh, health care and education. I agree with them, and I see that we have many seniors in the gallery today. One of my concerns as well is the lack of mention of seniors in this Speech from the Throne.

I was speaking with a senior the other day, and he said to me: I'm not quite sure how much money we can spend right now, Colleen, because we don't know how long we're going to live. I thought that's a very, very sad statement from a senior who has worked hard all his life. He and his wife have provided very well for their children, and now they're retired and on a fixed income. As expenses go up and they're expected to pay for more things that used to be covered, health care benefits and many seniors benefits, more is coming out of their pocket, but less is going in. So it was a grave concern for him and, I thought, a sad statement. He doesn't know how long he's going to live, so he didn't know what he could spend per month. I think there was one mention of the word "seniors" in here, and I think that's something that certainly this government should be looking at, and obviously they are not.

One of the things, now, that the children always say is health care. They know. Either they've had a cousin or an aunt or an uncle who's been trying to get into emergency, into the hospital, and we all know that when they're on red alert – that almost came out wrong. A red light is different than a red alert. I know many people who work in emergency in hospitals. Can you imagine how it must feel when it is your profession to provide care to say, "There's no room here; you'll have to go somewhere else"? Now, that's a pretty sad statement as to where Alberta has come with regard to health care and how we treat people and how we value health in this province, and I would venture to say that it was certainly not addressed in this speech.

You've heard it here before, and I'll take this opportunity to repeat it: the health boundaries. Mr. Speaker, you and I were even at an event in Morinville at a facility that they've renovated to serve those people better. I remember you speaking, in fact, if I'm at liberty to say this, about how boundaries shouldn't mean anything and that if they do, then maybe we shouldn't have any boundaries at all. I agree with you. They shouldn't mean anything, and if they do mean something, maybe we shouldn't have any at all. But reality is: those boundaries are brick walls.

I have a constituent whose family has been writing resolutions through their groups and stuff to different people to lobby government to open up long-term care beds, to make it possible for someone who lives in Villeneuve to get a long-term care bed in St. Albert or Edmonton, because it's not possible. I think

that's a very sad statement about how we treat people who need long-term care. In fact, I was with many seniors this morning who expressed their concern about that.

One of the other things. Education is going to get some money. Well, that's good. I notice there certainly wasn't enough to give teachers back their 5 percent. Nurses have gotten back their 5 percent. Many sectors have. I guess that's not important.

2:50

MR. MAR: Many teachers have. Tell the whole story.

MRS. SOETAERT: Very few teachers have. I woke them up again. I love that about this opportunity.

But you know what I thought when the minister was describing the money that was going into education? To me it was a shell game: you know, those magicians who move around money. You open up the shell and it's not there; it's in the next one. Well, all three were empty, and that's how that shuffle really worked, that somehow he slipped that little pea away and there's virtually no money up his sleeve for education.

I want to speak a bit about the VLTs, which has been a hot topic this week in the Legislature and certainly in the papers. I find it rather arrogant that this government won't even consider a provincial plebiscite. What are we afraid of? Let people say what they want with VLTs, whether they want them or not. What are we afraid of? There's a municipal election coming up. Add a little question on the bottom of the ballot. It wouldn't cost you too much. Heck of a plan. That would be like democracy. That would be, but that's not going to happen.

MR. MAR: Wouldn't it be arrogant for us to add it to a municipal ballot?

MRS. SOETAERT: Now, there's a question: would it be arrogant to add it to a municipal ballot? I bet that if they asked, they'd consider it an opportunity that would save them doing a plebiscite. Why, I bet they'd welcome the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and if they do it themselves, it would be a patchwork across the province, not consistent across the province, not a provincial view, which leads me to the environment and the ability to have a provincial view of what we need in this province with regards to the environment.

You know what? The minister of the environment said today that he would meet with any group. Well, it just so happens that I have a copy of the people that he was unable to meet with, and to their credit the previous ministers of the environment, our now Premier and Mr. Evans, both made sure that they attended this Alberta Environmental Network annual general meeting. I bet even you attended it once upon a time, Mr. Speaker. Regretfully, this minister doesn't have time or is too arrogant to make the attempt to go; I don't know. But I could table four copies of that – and I think I will – just so the minister gets that information to find out who he's refused seeing.

A few other things. I thought it was the greatest piece of work and piece of irony that there are programs for literacy for young children. Well, hello. Guess what you took away three years ago? Funding for kindergarten. Well, hello. [interjection] Grade 2, grade 3, grade 1. You mean you're just narrowing it, just enveloping money? This is hilarious, because we have elected school boards who are told where to spend the money, and then when they send them an envelope of money, they even envelope the envelope. So you're telling them where to spend these literacy dollars, on who, on what, and when. You know,

if you're not going to be an arrogant government, then give those elected officials the right to spend the money that you send. If you send a literacy program, let them implement it the way . . . [interjection] Stand up on a point of order and ask me a question, Mr. Minister.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

Now, another point I want to talk about is advanced education. Those students are coming out of there – and I read it; it was Canada-wide. I think we heard the stats yesterday, that the average debt that kids are coming out of university with is \$12,000. Yet the stats I read in the paper this morning, Madam Speaker, were about \$23,000 or \$24,000 that they're in debt.

MR. MAR: It's still a bargain.

MRS. SOETAERT: And the Minister of Education calls it a bargain. I would venture to say that maybe that minister comes from a different financial background than many other people in this province, and I'm sure he counts himself lucky that he does.

However, there are students going into debt, and it's not a bargain for the people of Alberta if somebody comes out of university so in debt that it takes them 20 years to pay back that loan, let alone invest in a home and in a community and a life, if they're paying back their debts forever.

Now, maybe the Minister of Education didn't come out of university with a debt. Maybe he had parents he could stay with. Maybe he didn't live far away from a centre. Maybe they had the money to pay for it. Maybe he didn't have to work part-time. Maybe he did. [interjections] I love to wake them up. But I know students who work part-time, \$4.50 an hour. That's pathetic. That is pathetic. In fact, if this government would have the courage to address the minimum wage, maybe they wouldn't be coming out with such debt. If these students were working part-time at \$4.50 an hour, going to university, where tuition costs about 3,800 bucks right now at the U of A, then you add your books . . .

MR. MAR: Thirty-three hundred.

MRS. SOETAERT: I think you could be wrong, Mr. Minister, because I cosigned my son's loan. Or else maybe I'm paying for a nice apartment.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who cosigned your loan?

MRS. SOETAERT: Who cosigned my loan? I worked part-time back then. Tuition wasn't as expensive back when I went to university. Back then I actually got 4 bucks an hour. So things haven't really progressed for kids.

I must say that in advanced ed I want to see that cap put on. I'd like to see it at 20 percent. I'd also like to see that minimum wage addressed so that our young adults don't come out of university so in debt that it's depressing, that it's overwhelming. Many of us can sit in here and chuckle because – you know what? – we make a decent wage. You may have a partner who makes a decent wage, and maybe you're at the point in your life where your mortgage is paid. I'm not but maybe some in here are. [interjection] You still have a mortgage, Madam Minister? That's discouraging. I do but that's okay. So the reality of it is that we have young people who are in terrible debt coming out of

university, and as light as we make of it in here, it's very serious and it's depressing for them.

I want to speak for a few minutes about research and technology. I think I read something about that in here. There, science and research. Oh, two sentences. Well, the reality of that is I want him to know about a program here in Edmonton. It has to do with blood type and tissue. I'm going to send him a note to invite him to go see that research place of a Dr. Locksly McGann, who's very well respected, and some of you in here may know him and the work that he does. Regretfully, they struggle from grant to grant. They wait for a federal grant, and then the provincial grant matches it. I would venture to say, selfishly, that we will get back money and we will have some technology and some expertise and some medical advancements that will be the envy of the world if these types of programs continue. So I encourage the minister of science and technology to look into that.

I want to take a moment to talk about transportation, and none of you will be surprised in here when I speak about the reality of some of our highways. You all know the highway of which I will speak, and it's called 794. I'm sure many of you have traveled on 794. I'm sure the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca has traveled on highway 794 and maybe Bonnyville-Cold Lake. It's a death trap. Just two weeks ago another person died on that road and left a young family. The reality of it is: let's forget about political boundaries and let's talk about safety in this province. If we have a highway that needs fixing, then we should fix it because of traffic flow and because of safety and not because somebody wants a road paved to their driveway. So that's my humble plea to the minister of transportation, that he'll look at highway 794 in this next session and address the issues of safety and the fact that so many people have died on that road.

Agriculture wasn't overly mentioned in this at all. Oh, there's two sentences, something about intensive livestock and how he's going to watch that and the cattle industry to inspect its own brands. Funny that nothing was mentioned about the plight of farmers up near Athabasca and up near Peace River. Why didn't those MLAs bring that forward, I wonder. Those farmers have been rained out two years in a row. So FIDP doesn't apply to them because it goes back one year and is based on your income of the year before. Well, if you're flooded out the year before, you have nothing.

MR. SEVERTSON: It's a five-year average.

3:00

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you for adding that, but it's not a five-year average for disaster relief. They can't get anything for disaster relief out there. The reality of that, as the Member for Peace River would know, is that we are losing small communities. It's not just a farm that goes belly-up. These are people who belong to communities, and they keep them alive and they make them vibrant. They are part of the community that contributes to it. Maybe people who live in huge cities lose the benefit of small rural communities, that I'm fortunate to come from and I know many members opposite are. In fact, I brag about that in our caucus. But the reality of it is that those small communities are going to be gone if this government doesn't address that fact that they've been flooded out two years in a row, and they can't even get on the land this spring.

This hasn't happened before. This is an exceptional time. These farmers have never asked for anything from the government. These are your farmers. [interjections] Oh, the Education minister and the Minister of Energy are saying: what, they

haven't? Well, you know what? They worked very hard on that land. They've been flooded out two years in a row, and for the first time they're asking for help, and this government is ignoring them. I would address that to the minister of agriculture and hope that he finds within his power, maybe within the agriculture finance act, a way that he can help them, because it's desperate up there. [interjection] I see that one minister understands what I'm talking about. Thank you. The minister from a small rural community herself, Community Development, is on the same wavelength. Is that good or bad? We don't know. But I think that's very good today.

I want to say – and I know my time is probably running out, much to the disappointment of many people across the way – that one of the things I want to see out of this session is a government that respects democracy, that listens to the other side. Hard as it is to give a compliment to the minister of science and technology, the move today with the film industry, what looks like is going to be a tax credit, is a good move. That industry brings a lot of business into our communities, into our province. It's part of culture that you just can't throw away and think you'll get back the next year when you decide to finance it. They're finally waking up to some good Liberal suggestions, and that's why we applauded him. You know what? It gives me hope for democracy. It is a roundabout, backdoor method that the opposition has to work through, but it can work.

We saw another bill being brought back this year, and that was one that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek presented about X-rated video movies not being available to children. Good. We brought that in in '93. How many years later is it? So that was good, and we'll support that bill since it's ours.

The other one, which I haven't seen, that I really think is very, very important is the domestic violence bill. I don't know why people are avoiding it, why they're not bringing it forward. We heard about ostriches burying their heads in the sand. We hear that it may be coming, and we're going to work on it. We're working with you, and we want to make it a very strong piece of legislation so that people are safe in this province. [interjection] Well, if the one that is introduced is weak, we will always amend it to make it better. At least we will try.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, I'm most grateful for this opportunity to reply to the Speech from the Throne. I'm very fortunate in my riding to represent two cities and a rural area, to have three RHAs and five school boards. It's quite an interesting riding that I come from, and I'm very fortunate to meet a lot of very good people, well, the best in the province, I would say, from my riding, and that would wake up my members on this side of the House. I do want to say that I was disappointed with the Speech from the Throne, but I'm very glad to have the opportunity to reply to it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MRS. BLACK: Here you go, Pam. Do the anarchy one.

MS BARRETT: Do the anarchy one? The hon. Minister of Economic Development has asked me to do the anarchy one. I'll sit down for a minute while she explains. Go ahead. Come on.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, through the chair. You have the floor.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I liked those good old polite days. Do you remember the good old days prior to

1993? When an opposition member was standing, if a government member wanted to ask a question, the opposition member would sit down and say, "Go for it" and vice versa. Remember those good old days? I loved the civility of this place then.

Okay. The anarchy speech. This is the anarchy speech, according to the hon. Minister of Economic Development. I'm pleased that the Premier is saying that the future of Alberta's children will be the government's number one policy. However, I am waiting for the government to put its rhetoric into action. These words drafted by the hon. minister – I'm sorry; I'll correct that for the record. We're just having a joke here. She did not write these words; I did.

In looking at the government's overall track record, I can only conclude that in most respects this government has failed Alberta's children. [interjection] Oh, yeah. You would have found out soon enough. A study released last week by the Child Poverty Action Group shows that in 1996 the city of Edmonton had a higher percentage of children living in absolute poverty than any other major city in Canada. I'd like to point out, Madam Speaker, that the reason the children are poor is because their parents are poor. So I would like to know where the government's commitment to providing health and dental benefits to low-income working families is. The Minister of Family and Social Services generated positive front-page headlines a month ago by saying he was considering this, but I opened up the throne speech and the commitment was nowhere to be found.

The minister well knows that there are a growing number of working poor in Alberta due to the regressive labour laws of this government. The working poor usually don't receive through their jobs extended health benefits like prescription drugs or dental coverage, and as the minister knows, the lack of such benefits can be a disincentive to leave the welfare rolls. So I ask the government: what happened to your commitment to provide these benefits to low-income working Albertans? It's completely obvious to me that that's the kind of subsidy, instead of royalty holidays for the oil companies, that actually makes a difference to the quality of life of Albertans.

I'd also like to point out the fact that this government is the only province in Canada that still has not ratified the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. And you're applauding, Mr. Technology Minister. You don't believe in endorsing it. You believe that Alberta should be the only province that hasn't endorsed this.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, through the chair, please. And let's have some of the noise on this side stop as well.

MS BARRETT: Madam Speaker, thank you, but I really don't mind. I like being able to get on the record what these ministers are saying. So if they say I'm off the record and I can repeat them on the record and they're acknowledging that I'm repeating it accurately, all the better for me.

Among these rights that the Alberta government has refused to endorse is the right of every child to have the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. Now, what's so difficult for a responsible government about signing this particular convention? I don't understand this.

One positive initiative I'm prepared to support – and it's going to committee next week – is the government's bill to combat child prostitution. I want to talk about this for a minute. All you have to do in my riding is drive or walk a couple of blocks from where

I live – and I'm not kidding, folks – and what you will see is prostitutes as young as 11 years old. Eleven. [interjection] Oh, yeah, it's true and it's gotten worse.

You know, to everybody here, when I first got elected in 1986 – and I've lived in the same area since 1982, since I moved back from Scotland – I would say that the youngest prostitute you saw in those days was maybe 16, 17. Now they're 11 and 12 years old. And if you want to know how I know, it's because I've asked them: how old are you? They recognize me, so they're not shy about talking to me. [interjections] Yeah, it is that bad. So I say to this government: congratulations on getting tough on the johns and the pimps. Let's put them behind bars.

I'd like to point out one more piece of this legislation that nobody has really talked about, and that is the likelihood that it will promote whistle-blowing by the young prostitutes themselves. If they think that their evidence can land those you know what's – fill in the line there – into jail and subject them to a \$25,000 penalty, you know what? They might just blow the whistle. So I'm very happy to have this legislation. The riding that I represent probably has the highest number of prostitutes in the entire city, so thank you for that.

3:10

My only concern about that legislation is the follow-up services. I'm pleased about the three-day apprehension policy, but what happens after that? I think three days is enough to clean up a kid, particularly if she's been on drugs or alcohol, which is most commonly the case. It's enough time to get that out of the system, but if there is no follow-up service, they still might be tempted, partly because they've grown up in homes characterized by poverty and abuse, to go back out on the street. So when we get to committee, I will be asking specific questions about the follow-up that is intended, and I hope there are some serious bucks to be announced next Thursday in the budget.

I note also the government introduction of the Personal Property Bill of Rights. Now, at the same time, this government is the only one in the entire country that has still made no commitment to prohibit discrimination based upon sexual orientation in its human rights legislation. I think it says a lot about this government's priorities when it's prepared to protect property rights of gun owners while continuing to deny fundamental human rights of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Albertans. The Minister of Education is applauding that point. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thanks for the applause from the opposition bench as well as my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona.

I, too, lament the fact that the government did not bring in its overdue legislation to protect victims of family violence. Apparently there was insufficient support for this legislation in the Conservative caucus. That's what I read in the newspapers. It's not like I've got a pipeline into the government caucus. I wish I did. Any volunteers? This is one piece of needed legislation that I do urge the government to put back onto the agenda.

I do also note that this is still a government that adheres blindly to the ideology of privatizing public services. The spate of privatizations that occurred between '93 and '97 is coming back to haunt the government. Government's privatization agenda is unraveling before our very eyes. First we had the CKUA fiasco, where two independent audits revealed that taxpayers' money was literally stolen right from under the nose of the now Minister of Energy. The ongoing privatization of provincial parks and recreation areas is resulting in hundreds of campgrounds and day use facilities being closed while the environmental integrity of these special places is threatened.

Most recently, though, we had the Travel Alberta fiasco, and I would like to congratulate the Minister of Economic Development for extending the agreement with Travel Alberta for the extra six months in the hopes that things will get fixed. [interjection] Yeah. Okay. That's very true. I was concerned about the 55 employees who worked there, not just because they might lose their jobs, but they might also carry with them a reputation that should perhaps only be assigned to one person within the organization. Those jobs are now extended, and we hope for a bright conclusion to this.

MRS. BLACK: And their talents preserved.

MS BARRETT: And their talents preserved, as the minister so rightfully points out.

I served in this Assembly between 1986 and 1993, when the Getty government's financial giveaways cost taxpayers billions and billions of dollars. That experience taught me that this government had a knack for picking economic losers and basket cases unique in modern Canadian political history. It's almost a textbook case of how government should not invest in the economy. In the same way that the Getty government's loans and loan guarantees to private businesses unraveled between '89 and '93, the privatization misadventures between 1993 and '97, years when there were no New Democrats in the Legislature to critique these reckless experiments, by the way, are unraveling during this term of the Legislature. You don't have to take my word for it. In fact, the best accounting of this government's privatization misadventures is contained in the annual report of our very own Auditor General.

Do you want to know why this government's privatization agenda is unraveling? It's a little thing called accountability. These private agencies that the government keeps setting up are just not accountable to the citizens of Alberta, this despite the fact that in many cases they either directly receive taxpayers' money or are given an exclusive right to deliver public service by charging fees to Albertans, fees that, I might point out, include fees that Albertans never had to pay before, when we could go and register our vehicles with the government directly or mail in our forms. First it was 4 bucks on top of the government charge; now it's going to be 5 bucks. Mark my word, Madam Speaker, by the end of the summer when that so-called review is completed, it'll be 6 bucks. Those registries are going to get the 50 percent increase they asked for six months ago. They're just doing it piecemeal.

I don't believe this government will ever bother regulating all of those vital statistics so-called services that you have to go to a private registry to obtain now. They've got markups of between 19 and 68 percent, and all they're doing is faxing a form to the vital statistics department. It's the vital stats people who are doing the work. The form gets faxed back, and voilà, you're slapped with – what? – up to a 68 percent surcharge on the transaction.

Establishing private monopolies to deliver services destroys accountability and undermines democracy itself. Now, this does not have to preclude partnerships with the private sector in areas such as tourism marketing, where it has apparently in the past been appropriate.

Now, the government also hinted at tax cuts. Well, that's to be expected. No specifics of course, just kind of a vague promise. So I'll take the initiative now to offer a few tax cut ideas for the government that weren't addressed in the throne speech. First of all, eliminate health care premiums. It's been the NDP policy for – how long? Got any idea, Member for Edmonton-Strathcona? –

as long as I can recall, and I've been a party member for a little over 30 years. When did we get them introduced? For at least 25 years the NDP has said no to health care premiums. They're regressive, they penalize middle-class Albertans while letting wealthy Albertans pay less, and it's a stupid way to raise money for health care. Get rid of it. Eight hundred dollars back in the pockets of Albertans each year. Remember that it's the middle class whose standard of living has been eroded during the last five years in particular.

Second, stay away from across-the-board tax rate reductions. That'll only benefit higher income Albertans disproportionately. Focus tax breaks where they're needed most, which is for average working people. Or how about – oh, I like this – raising the ceiling for the family employment tax credit for day care subsidies and other benefits? Ceilings right now are way too low. A family with a couple of kids earning \$30,000 or \$35,000 a year is not rich. It'd make a big difference in their wallets. Those are just a couple of ideas.

The point is that this government needs to see the province through the eyes of the middle class and working Albertans and stop seeing only their well-connected friends. The New Democrat vision for Alberta is very different. We base our plan on common sense. What we want is what will work for average, middle-class Albertans. You could call our vision an agenda for fairness, where seniors, who by the way took a 30 percent hit in the cuts to their benefits over a three-year period, women, working people, and children truly take the front seat. That's our vision.

The New Democrat vision also includes a hospital system where people don't have to lie in a hospital hallway for three days in order to get a bed. It includes an education system that doesn't need to resort to bingos and casinos to pay for textbooks. The New Democrats want to freeze advanced education tuition, not at some theoretical number like 30 percent of operating expenses but at current dollar levels, and then start moving it back down to make postsecondary education affordable again. It's only common sense to do these things.

MR. MAR: It's a bargain now.

MS BARRETT: Oh, yeah. The minister says it's a bargain. Have a look and see if there are any poor people at university these days. Go to the U of A. I might have been the last person of a low-income family that ever got there.

If we want a well-educated population, if we want to be a leader in this information age, when prosperity comes from knowledge, then we need to make sure that our young people can afford to get an education.

Alberta's economy is apparently on the upswing: profits up, corporate directors' salaries up. Why aren't average incomes going up? Why are average working people working harder and longer for the same amount of money? The New Democrat agenda, a vision, includes making sure everyone shares in our prosperity, and those who've been toiling at minimum wage for the last six years without an increase are specifically included.

The throne speech fails Albertans because it doesn't use enough common sense. Our children deserve more than a few words of praise. They deserve some substance behind those happy sounding words, and that is particularly true of children of low-income families where the parents are not at entry-level jobs. They're stuck in \$5 an hour jobs because this government won't raise the minimum wage.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the throne speech, Madam Speaker.

3:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to also address the Speech from the Throne that we heard last week and to talk a little bit about what my constituents, I'm sure, were looking for in the Speech from the Throne. What I'm sure they were looking for was a vision, something that showed courage, something that showed forward thinking, something that showed direction and a plan, and something that they could grasp and say: yes, this government understands what our daily lives are about. You know, had this been the throne speech from a Liberal government, I'm sure that that's what they would have found.

Unfortunately, what we have in this particular throne speech is a document that tends to be selective, a document that looks at picking winners and losers, a document that is not inclusive of all Albertans, and a document that does not look at how we can best ensure that all Albertans will share in the success of this province. We have a document that reflects a government that is tired, a document that reflects a government with no vision, a document that indeed reflects – and I will use the analogy that the Premier likes to use, of a house that has undergone renovation, a house that has been rebuilt. What I see in this document is a house that reflects a foundation that is cracked and a house that is close to tumbling in certain areas.

We need to look at what the recommendations of the Growth Summit were. Also, some of the members in this House will remember what the recommendations were of the roundtables, that were spoken about this afternoon, on health care and the roundtables on education, and I'm sure there were other roundtables as well. When you look at what those recommendations were, you do not see them reflected in the policies of this government. In fact, when you look at the Growth Summit, that was held many months ago, the best that this government can say is that shortly there will be provided a detailed response to each of the recommendations made at the Alberta Growth Summit.

Now, Madam Speaker, I was under the impression that when we did not have any fall sitting of the Legislative Assembly, the government would indeed have been hard at work and that one of the primary areas the government would have been hard at work at would have been to look at the recommendations from the Growth Summit so that when we finally entered this Legislative Assembly, we would have had that tabled on our first day. But, no, that's not the case. So maybe when the government and the government members talk about less government, they also talk about less work that they in fact do.

When we look at what in fact this province has become over the last two to three years, we see again that this province has become divided. We see that in fact there are some individuals and some areas of the province that have done exceedingly well. We also see that there are many who have not done so well. In fact, one of our growth industries appears to be food banks, and that's one area that I would have liked to have seen addressed in the Speech from the Throne. This was an issue that needed to be addressed, and it was not a vision or a method of economic development to have an increase in food banks in this province.

I would have liked to have seen a vision on education, where in fact the vision would have talked about a seamless education system that would be available to all throughout the province. I would have liked to have seen some mention made under eco-

omic development, developing people, strong communities, education – it could have been under any one of these elements – that one of the things this government would ensure was that children would not go to school with an empty stomach and hungry. There's nothing that impedes education or the development of our youth more than going to school on an empty stomach. In my constituency, which is not one of the poorer constituencies as a whole in the city of Edmonton, there are children that go to school hungry every day.

I would have liked to have seen the commitment by this government with regards to health care that private health care would not be promoted, that private health care in this province would not be permitted, that there would be no ability for health care to become an enterprise that would in fact end up costing us the taxpayers more. All one has to do is look at the costs of health care in the United States, where people are excluded from accessibility to the health care system and the average cost of providing that system is significantly higher than what it is in Canada today.

I would have liked to have seen an acknowledgement that the policies of this government have adversely affected certain areas. One of the areas that I found especially interesting, because it was also highlighted during the Premier's commercial that we heard three weeks ago, was with regards to the rising caseloads in child welfare. There was no acknowledgement that perhaps, just perhaps the government's policies might have had an effect, that there might be a cause-and-effect relationship between the cuts in welfare, between the cuts in services to children and families in need and the increase in the rising caseloads in child welfare.

Particularly ironic, I thought, was the mention made with regards to quality public services. In effect, in this province over the last three years we have seen a decrease in the number of extremely qualified public servants from 20 percent to 14 percent; that is the figure I saw recently. If we are to go back to one of the recommendations by one of the former ministers of this government, Ken Rostad, who was asked to chair one particular portion of the Growth Summit, his recommendations were very clear when it came to public servants. What he said was that we are at a crisis point in the government being able to provide quality services because of the lack of public servants that could provide those services and that in fact there are danger levels with regards to management in the public service.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Part of that is because of the trend to part-time employment and contract employment, which is based solely on the rationale that that employment is cheaper, but it does not take into account that cheaper doesn't necessarily mean better quality or better value for your money. This is a problem that I believe this government has. It cannot distinguish between price and value and that sometimes in order to have value, you need to pay the appropriate amount.

There are areas such as seniors. When I indicated that the province has picked winners and losers, they seem to be picking children, which of course are winners, and forgetting about other segments of our population such as the seniors. Again, seniors have one paragraph devoted to them, which basically says that there's going to be “a review of long-term care services in the province.” Now, if this review is anything like reviews we've seen in the past, unfortunately our seniors will have to wait a long time not only for the results of the review but actual implementa-

tion. The history of this government has been that if they don't like what they hear from a review, then they shelve it or, as in the case of a previous review that we had on seniors' issues, they shred it.

3:30

When we look at the different areas and who has benefited over the last three years from the so-called boom in Alberta, we have some startling figures, and I would like to put them into the public record because I think they indicate that not everyone has managed to reap the successes over the last few years. When we see the figures that employment has increased, what is often not mentioned is that part of that increase is part-time and temporary work and that in fact part-time jobs have increased by 18.6 percent over the last five years. Almost 20 percent of all jobs in Alberta now are part-time.

Along with that increase in part-time employment, of which a large number are young workers who are not attending school and who are probably earning close to the minimum wage, what we also see is that the earnings and benefits of workers have decreased and that on average temporary workers, employees, are earning 17.5 percent less per hour than permanent workers and 35.4 percent less on a weekly basis. So if we take that to a dollar figure, what we see is that the weekly rate of pay for a temporary employee is \$374 versus that of a permanent employee of \$579.

What we're also seeing is an uneven distribution of the hours of work. Therefore, what we're seeing is people who are overworked and overstressed, and we're seeing another group of people who have less dollars to spend and who are not having their skills appropriately utilized.

When we look at the average earnings for people – and I'm sure all of us know Albertans who are saying: I'm working harder, I'm working longer, but somehow I'm not bringing home more pay. Well, the reason for that is very simple. The rate of average earnings between 1983 and 1996 has fallen 13.9 percent. So what we see is that family incomes are declining. As I indicated earlier, we also see an increase in the need for certain agencies, certain services to step in, such as food banks.

So where does all that lead us? It leads us to a Speech from the Throne that is unimaginative, to a Speech from the Throne that indicates a government that has run out of good ideas and a government that refuses to realistically look at what is going on in the province. I'm glad that the Minister of Labour has walked into the room, because one of those areas is the whole issue . . . [interjections] Sorry; you can strike that. I'd like to address this to the Minister of Labour, who I've just noticed.

One of the key concerns is the issue around minimum wage, and although I know the minister talks about the market forces, what he needs to recognize is that when you look at the value of the minimum wage and take that to 1986 dollars, the minimum wage today is worth \$3.67. In real, constant dollars, 1986 dollars, that minimum wage has drastically dropped. It does not do any service to talk about, I believe, eliminating the minimum wage, when we look at: how do we make things better in this province so that everyone can share in the success of the province? There are other areas that I'm sure will be addressed or that have been addressed by other colleagues. What we need is a government that doesn't just provide . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, the Minister of Labour is rising on a point of order. Would you cite?

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. SMITH: I guess, Mr. Speaker, it would be reverse *Beauchesne* 484. Is the member in fact asking me a question? I'd be pleased to respond.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm not sure that I understood that. The hon. member in her speech did address something to the hon. Minister of Labour. I presume that's what the hon. Minister of Labour is trying to do now: to ask a question of the hon. member. Or are you suggesting the reverse?

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member, as a matter of fact, talked to me and said: I'm pleased that the Minister of Labour is paying attentive regard to my speech, because I want to question him and submit to him about the minimum wage. Clearly, the member knows there's a review going on, and we look forward to her individual submission.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour was attempting to ask whether the hon. member would entertain a question. That was supposed to be what it is, but he was able to surreptitiously insert a number of words. So I think the hon. member can carefully ignore those and complete her talk on the Speech from the Throne.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted the Minister of Labour to pay particular attention to the whole issue of minimum wage, because I know that that's something he is looking at reviewing, and not eliminate it.

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour is rising yet again on a point of order. Presumably it will be a citation and a very succinct point, without elaboration of any kind.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. SMITH: Your hopes are about to be, hopefully, not dashed, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 23, imputing false motives.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: That would be Standing Orders?

MR. SMITH: Standing Orders, yes.

In fact, the Minister of Labour pays very close attention at all times to issues surrounding those in his department, and I would ask the member to withdraw the fact that I'm not paying close attention to this particular matter. I pay close attention to all matters relating to the Department of Labour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, do you care to reply to the purported point of order?

MS LEIBOVICI: I'm not sure that the minister has the right point of order if he was talking about *Beauchesne* 23. That talks about the expressions "next sitting," "next sitting day," "next sitting of the House."

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. I think the hon. minister was quoting the right numbers but from the wrong book. In any event, the chair would rule that it's a point of

clarification that the minister wants and not a point of order.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, we hope that you'll be able to complete your reply to the Speech from the Throne without further interruption.

3:40

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was summarizing my reply to the Speech from the Throne and indicating that I had hoped for more in this particular speech, given the long absence from the Legislative Assembly and, I'm sure, the undivided attention that the government was providing to ensure that there would be a vision and direction and plan for this province for the next two to three years. Unfortunately, what we saw in the Speech from the Throne is very much what we have seen over the last few years, and that is lip service to ideas but very little that can be referred to as carried through.

Now, just to summarize, we will obviously see over the next two months in the legislation that is put forward whether in fact there is an intent to carry through on ensuring that children are a priority and that people's needs are reflected. Again, I hope to be pleasantly surprised by the legislation and especially the budget that is to be put forward in the next week.

One area that I believe deserves some mention is the area around technology and research, which unfortunately was not very elaborated upon in the throne speech. In fact, when we look at people development and the knowledge-based industries that we are told will be the future of any vibrant economy, what we find is that it is not listed in here as part of the plan and the vision. The first step, I believe, would be something in the nature of employment tax credits for the technology and research industries as a totality, which, it's my understanding, would provide the incentive to ensure the development of knowledge-based industries in Alberta.

For those that say we do not provide tax credits, one only has to look at the logging industry and the oil industry to know that in fact this province does and has and will provide tax credits to those industries. Therefore, I can only encourage the government to look very favourably upon this issue to ensure that those in the industries, as well as our children, have the opportunity to take part in the growing knowledge-based industries that will be the economic drivers in the next 10 to 20 years.

Another area that unfortunately was not addressed when we talk about the economic engines of our economy was small business. It would at least have seemed appropriate to make mention of their abilities and of their contribution to our economic growth. Unfortunately, they have not been included in the throne speech. I think what has not been included in the throne speech speaks volumes about the direction of this government. Hopefully, when we see the throne speech for 1999, some of the areas that have been pointed out by the very capable colleagues on the opposition benches will be addressed by this government.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank you and my colleagues for this opportunity to speak on the throne speech. I want to at the very outset record a concern of my constituents. This throne speech is separated from the previous one by a period of nine months. That period was not interrupted, as has been the case in the history of this Legislature, by a regular fall session.

So this is the first time, I think. If I'm not correct, I'd stand to be corrected, but over the last 30 years at least this might be the first time this has happened.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer is rising on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MR. DAY: It would be difficult to find a point of order on this, and I would therefore ask the member if he would entertain a brief and user friendly question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member is asked if he would entertain a question.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I accept that. As I said, I'm not entirely sure about it. All I want to do is record the concern of my constituents. During the fall repeatedly they stopped me to ask: why is there no fall session? I'm not talking about history now; I'm talking about a fact. I hope the hon. Treasurer would acknowledge this fact. All of us know this. All I'm doing as an MLA, as someone representing my constituents, is recording this.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, you did say yes. Do you withdraw that?

DR. PANNU: Yes, I withdraw it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. Continue then, hon. member.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: The pre-eminent theme of the speech is ostensibly captured by the phrase "agenda for opportunity." This speech talks about a solid foundation that this government has built for the next generation and that Alberta seemingly enjoys the highest employment rate in Canada, according to the throne speech, and the highest forecasted economic growth in the country. Mr. Speaker, I will agree with these general observations. There's no doubt that this province has experienced a very rapid and high rate of economic growth. It has also experienced fairly healthy growth in the levels of employment. These are, in my view, broad general features of the situation.

However, when you scratch the surface of this apparent reality, you find that there are serious problems with the kind of employment that's being generated and that the benefits of the rates of growth, which are high, are very, very uneven. There is a very large number of Albertans – and I'm afraid their numbers are growing – who work and are still poor. The number of working poor in this province is growing, not declining. The numbers of people who work at levels of wage which are closer to minimum wage are large indeed. It is these relatively low wage levels, that resulted from the pattern of economic development that the policies of this government encourage in this province, which have led to the growth of this growing number of working poor. When you have a large number of working poor in a province, you also have larger numbers of children who grow up in poverty.

The second major theme of this throne speech is the theme that "children will come first in the house we call Alberta." This house has been under renovation. Our hon. Premier has reminded

us ever so often that this renovation was badly needed and that once we are done with it, everyone will benefit from it. It's my submission, Mr. Speaker, that this house has undergone the renovation. Now it's got three levels, if it had two levels before. It has got a basement, it has got the main floor, and now is added to it the penthouse.

The house that we have now got is such that it limits access to the penthouse to a very few. Another privileged minority occupies the main floor, and they are enjoying the renovated amenities that the house offers. But the majority of Albertans are being shown the way to the basement. These growing ranks of Albertans who are being shown the way to the basement include substantial numbers of the previously secure middle-income Albertans. There is a serious change that is taking place that is not healthy, Mr. Speaker, and the nature of this change has not been acknowledged in the throne speech, where it is appropriate, I think, for the government side to draw attention to some of the achievements such as rate of growth, such as declining unemployment rates in absolute terms. It is also, I think, the responsibility of a serious, democratically elected, concerned government to draw attention to serious problems that remain. In this speech that concern is absent.

3:50

While I'm on this theme of the renovation of a house, I should extend the analogy a little further. The house has now three levels, more than two, so it's a three-tiered house. We also have, along with the renovation of this house, in the process of development at least a two-tiered society. The policies of this government seem to be very successful in creating a two-tiered society out of a relatively homogenous and consensual community called Alberta. Not only is there a two-tiered society in the making, but we also of course are threatened by the development of a two-tiered education system. The two-tiered health care system has been the theme that Albertans have been very concerned about and paying attention to. This House has been seized by the importance and the gravity of the situation with regard to what's happening to the health care system.

Now we have added another two-tiered element to the reality of this community called Alberta, and that is the very recent developments that have taken place which are now going to create a two-tiered day care system. With the withdrawal of the day care allowance, which will start taking place on the 1st of April and the process will be completed in two years, we will have, I'm sure, a two-tiered day care system.

So we have, then, a renovated house which certainly doesn't provide equal comfort to all of its residents. It's a house which, of course, also has in its neighbourhood what I call – it's a house that's located on a big farm. Residents of the house have tried to rent part of the farm in order to generate some rental revenues for themselves. The oil and gas industry represents this renting process. We derive rent – not taxes; I'm talking about rent in particular – in the form of oil and gas royalties. Those royalties are a rent. This rent has been frozen by virtue of the policies of this government since about 1986. Not only has it been frozen, but in fact the rate of the rent may have been adjusted downwards over the years since the early '80s. The renters are now so rich, so powerful that they're going to become residents of the property it seems. It will be very difficult to demonstrate that the renters, who are there as tenants, are not now becoming the real owners of the farm.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, the treasure house that sits next to the big house is now worried about the revenue situation. The other

day when the Premier was asked questions about the VLTs and how they might generate massive revenues for the general revenue fund of the province, he suddenly got very concerned and suggested that perhaps the province's revenues will be seriously hurt if VLT revenues stop coming in tomorrow. Now, it seems to me that the Premier was suggesting that the house might fall. You pull one card and the house of cards falls down. I'm not sure if the Premier would agree with me, but certainly he left that impression on me the other day that the situation of the treasure house is very fragile and that its fragility is to be prevented by continuing with VLT revenues coming in.

Now, I'm not concerned about the nature of this treasure house. I think Albertans are hardworking people. They pay their taxes; they pay their service fees; they pay their registry fees. These have been increasing, of course. Postsecondary students are paying their ever increasing tuition fees. We are all paying today medicare fees, but they're at least 60 percent more than they were in 1993 or 1992, when this present administration took over. So the treasure house I think is sound, its revenue situation is sound, but the Premier was trying to, I think, suggest that there's a need for alarm if the VLT revenues stop coming.

Albertans are concerned about VLT revenues. They don't see this treasure house as a house of cards, but they certainly are worried about this treasure house acquiring the reputation of a house of ill repute, if I may suggest. It is for this reason that many of them are concerned. Growing numbers of citizens of this province are concerned about the continuation of VLTs as a form of gambling that's highly addictive, that's destructive of family life, that's destructive of property commonly held by spouses and so on as a result of the breakup of marriage and whatnot. So there is a legitimate concern, and the government must respond to it. I'm somewhat encouraged that the Premier has relented on this point and that he is going to consult Albertans. We'll see what happens as a result of these consultations.

Mr. Speaker, another matter that I want to suggest is absent in the speech – and it concerned me – has to do with the future of the publicly funded medicare system in this province. This government prides itself in passing a law to try and put money into debt repayment and which makes it illegal for it to run budget deficits. Now, this government, which uses the leverage of laws that it has the power to pass to prevent things that it doesn't want from happening, should be coming out clearly in this session with legislation which will make it illegal for it and its ministers to allow the development of private, for-profit health care facilities, hospitals, to develop in this province. I challenge this government to take a position and to use the instruments that it's highly familiar with, that it has used skillfully to achieve its objectives, and to use the powers of this House to bring into existence an act that will disempower this government, even if it so wished, from moving in the direction of the creation of a two-tiered health care system and the creation of privately funded, for-profit health care facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the question of privatization has been touched on by my leader in her speech this afternoon. Privatization in my view poses a serious threat to public interest. What's being privatized bit by bit, systematically, is our common interest and our ability to protect and enhance those common interests we call public interests. It's another way of shredding the public interest.

The minister of intergovernmental affairs was asked I think in the last session by my leader: what's the position of this government with respect to the multilateral agreement on investments? In that exchange the minister said that the government is enthusi-

astically supportive of the MAI and that it will keep Albertans informed about the progress of the negotiations. I again see an absence of any mention in this throne speech of whether or not this government intends to inform Albertans, to share with them the critical information with respect to MAI. MAI does have very serious implications for what we as democratically elected governments can or cannot do in order to serve the interests of the people who have elected us to our positions in this House. This silence is ominous. I hope this government will make its position clear, that it will not only inform us but will encourage public debate on the issue of MAI before it takes any action, before it commits us without consulting us to this very, very far-reaching treaty, which we will not be able to reverse once we get into this.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I want to just briefly touch on the people development part of the throne speech. The Minister of Education I think valiantly fought within cabinet to get some more money for our kids to go to our schools. He had some minimal success in my view. All calculations suggest that only \$155 million over a period of three years would seem to be really new amounts. I'm willing to share my calculations with the minister on this. I'm not sure if what the minister has got for K to 12 will lead to either improvement of the conditions of teaching in the classroom or the reduction of class size or reducing the difficulties that parents and school counselors face in raising funds to provide for the basic necessities their schools need in order to do their job.

At the postsecondary education level what we have before us is a 30 percent solution that this government is presenting us with. It has got some students on its side. I congratulate them on their success. But I certainly see that this government is not really concerned about student debt, and that debt is accumulating. The latest figures about the accumulated total debt, every debt that Canadian students face, is about \$30,000, of which \$17,000 to \$18,000 seems to be provincial, as the minister of advanced education the other day recognized. A government survey of high schools in 1997, Mr. Speaker, undertaken jointly by the departments of Education and Advanced Education draws attention to the fact that high school students are extremely concerned with the rising costs of going to university and college, and it is their interests that are at stake, not so much the interests of those students at the universities and colleges who are about to exit from those institutions. The government's consultation is seriously flawed in this regard because it ignores the results of its own survey and ignores the high school students who'll be in the colleges and universities next year.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I say that this is not an agenda for opportunity. Albertans are worried that this might be an agenda for foreclosing opportunity in this province.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and comment on the Speech from the Throne. I noticed in reading through it that it talks about developing the heart of the Alberta advantage, our people. I find that the government talks about people, albeit in the throne speech they talk about people after they talk about money. They do talk about people, but it doesn't appear that they always include women as people. This is interesting, being that Alberta is the province from whence came the Famous Five, who were successful in having women declared as persons. Sometimes I think we need them back for the current day.

The throne speech talks about education, adult education, social services, women's shelters, health, seniors, maintenance enforcement, libraries, infrastructure, economic development, energy, agriculture, environment, science and research, and public service. I'd like to go through a few of those topics to see if women share in the Alberta advantage that is being proposed, in particular around adult education. Women have less money. They have less money to access adult education. They shoulder more responsibility for the children, and one of the points that was raised with me recently is that single mothers are having to add child care costs to the amount of their student loan. In effect, they're having to mortgage on their child's future. After graduation they will have to be paying back the loans, and that's going to include paying interest on the child care that they had to pay while they were in school. So it's more difficult for women to share in that opportunity for adult education.

Women are also less likely to own computers at home. They have less money, less resources to purchase them, and they have more difficulty accessing computers after hours at the colleges or schools because of security and child care concerns. This is a real concern to me. I am concerned that women will not be able to access the same opportunities in high-technology industries partly as a result of this.

Let me look at social services. Women on supports for independence are to be actively looking for jobs, but they cannot get funded for child care while they are doing this. They can only get child care subsidies once they have a job. So they risk being cut off because they aren't looking for work because they can't get child care, or they risk losing their children to child protection if they go out without securing adequate care. It puts them in a terrible catch-22 situation. I've heard from a number, not a lot but a couple, of constituents in Edmonton-Centre for whom this has been a real issue.

Now, women's shelters were mentioned in the throne speech. I'm grateful for the increase in the money that's being given, but I would also like to point out that shelters are still funded at 1985 levels. People working in shelters can't go out and buy the food or supplies that they need to use in the shelters in 1985 dollars. They have to pay in 1998 dollars, but that's all they're working on, funding dollars at the 1985 level. The shelters have never been funded for their outreach, counseling, or public education programs, so we still have the workers in shelters trying to do the job that they're paid for, to look after the women that are in the shelters, and frantically fund-raising to pay for the rest of the programs.

Something else that was brought to my attention is that the government is stressing that any agency that is receiving funding from them must be responsible and develop five-year business plans. Good idea. But I think it's really difficult to develop a business plan even as short as a year when, for example, one of the provincial associations had their grant cut back while they were in the fiscal year. Seven months into their fiscal year they have a percentage of their grant cut back while they're in the year, and then later the money is restored. Now, I don't know of many CAs or brilliant business people that could manage to cope with that kind of up and down and back and forth and still come out of it ahead and run their business plan. So, again, there's an expectation there on behalf of government that's making it very difficult for the organizations to work with.

Let's talk about health. We know that women make up many of the workers in the health care industry: the nurses, aides, janitorial and food services staff. They're dealing with more part-time work, fewer hours, lower wages, and the devaluing of their jobs. Women also shoulder the responsibility for caring for

relatives at home, be it their spouses, their children, elderly parents, dependent adults. Women are telling me that as more health care is downloaded onto the community, it's being downloaded onto them. So are they sharing in the opportunity?

Women are also consumers of the health care system, especially older women, as they live longer than men. There are a lot of senior citizens in Edmonton-Centre. They have been very good in communicating with me, and this is a real concern for them. They have real fears about the health care system. Many of those seniors, as I have said, are women, and they are afraid that with the limited income they have, they're going to end up in a basement suite eating cat food, and for some people . . . [interjection] Please, I do not want to hear anyone laughing about that. I don't think that's a laughing matter. I'd be very disappointed if the minister of science and technology was laughing at the thought of elderly people being in that bad a situation.

4:10

Many of the women, especially senior women, may not have a survivor pension. They may have never worked so didn't contribute to the Canada pension plan, or if they worked, they probably had lower earnings and interrupted work histories, so they're collecting less of a pension there. Those that had no other earnings are having to rely on the government system of assistance.

During the long break from the last session I visited all of the seniors' residences in my riding, and I wanted to put on the record the concerns that they raised with me, particularly over poverty, which I've just spoken about, and elder abuse. There is still nothing to protect elders in their homes. Although the Protection for Persons in Care Act is a valued addition to their lives, it does not help those who are not living in institutions. As I said, they're very concerned about access to health care. Interestingly, they were very concerned about the state of education. Many, many of them expressed that to me, and I felt that was very generous of them, not only their concern about their neighbours and their friends and themselves but concern for a younger generation and their educational opportunities.

The throne speech also talked about public service: "to retain, attract, and develop." Many of the civil servants, support workers, as we know are women. I'd like to know when they get their 5 percent back. They really need it now to help with the increase in child care costs, given that the subsidies to the child care centres have been cut. There are still a number of concerns being raised about the people that were released or terminated during the cutbacks and then rehired as contractors with no benefits and no pension.

You must see the pattern developing here: women are struggling to take their place here. I met with representatives from over 20 women's groups, and I'd like to give you the key concerns that they brought up in specific reference to provincial policy which I note were not included in the throne speech. Those include child care, the feminization of poverty, minimum wage, midwifery, the downloading of services onto women, mental health services, including sexual orientation under the human rights protection, democracy . . . [interjections]

MRS. SOETAERT: Lorne is very sensitive about that.

MS BLAKEMAN: They're sensitive about democracy?

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes, they are.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes, particularly because there was no fall

sitting, and they do look to us as legislators to be in this building working on the legislation for them.

Also, English as a Second Language training and how accessible that is to women. There were other concerns specifically raised: the continued funding for gender-specific employment training programs which were recently transferred from the federal government, and the concern is still being raised about including women's shelters under children's services. There is a concern there that in rural areas, in particular, few people have a broad base of knowledge on family violence issues, and I think there's also a concern that the protection programs would be moved away from the shelters into more informal levels, being church led. Once again, preventative programs have never been and continue not to be funded. There are grave concerns raised over the proposed health information system and its risk to women, particularly for personal security.

So I thought that in a spirit of helpfulness to assist the government develop gender sensitivity, earlier today I tabled copies of a guide developed by the British Columbia Ministry of Women's Equality, called Gender Lens: A Guide to Gender-Inclusive Policy and Program Development. I'm doing this starting with the assumption that we as legislators desire to have an equality of result, that we would like to see equality between men and women. I highly recommend this policy, and I'd hope that this Legislature and the government would adopt the policy and use it in all of their programs. We have some examples where we already analyze proposed legislation and policy for its effect. For instance, what is the effect on rural areas versus urban areas? As a result, sometimes we have programs that exist just for the benefit of one or for the other or to ameliorate an existing condition. [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'd just like to speak to the minister of science, research, and information technology.

I checked the list, since you've interrupted the hon. member on a number of occasions, to see whether or not you'd had an opportunity to speak, and lo and behold, you've spoken. So let us hope that's the last time while we're on the Speech from the Throne that we hear from you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To continue. We have programs that differentiate between single adults or adults and families. Some years ago the government developed a family matrix in which all government policies and legislation would be sieved through to ensure that it was of benefit to the family. So this is not a new idea for the government. I'm sure that it wouldn't be too difficult to adopt that sort of gender analysis. Perhaps I'm mistaken; perhaps the government already has a policy of gender analysis that it already uses. If that is the case, please tell us about it, promote it, use it, crow about it, because I don't see the effect of it in the legislation, and I have never heard of it coming out of any government department. Over half our population are women, and I do urge the government to adopt a gender analysis. I would be happy to work with the government on doing this. I would be very happy to. I'd like to be able to assist and work with this government to create legislation and policy which benefits all Albertans and through which all Albertans may enjoy the advantages.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we now adjourn debate on the Speech from the Throne.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has made a motion. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

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

Bill 2
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998

[Adjourned debate February 3: Ms Blakeman]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre, you have the opportunity to continue the debate. If not, then we'll take it out to other . . . [interjection] No, you can't hand off. That's in football.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm always pleased to speak to a government bill in this House, but I'm particularly pleased to speak to this one. Part of my enthusiasm comes from the very provocative comments made by our friend the Minister of Justice, that master of mischief. What we found was that minister saying that "Bill 20 has struck a reasonable balance." That was what he said a year ago when we were dealing with the original Conflicts of Interest Act bill. What we now deal with is son of Bill 20. What he said a year ago was simply:

It is in this atmosphere of public distrust and skepticism that governments have wrestled with the conflicts of interest issue.

It struck me at the time, a year ago – and nothing has changed in the intervening 12 months – that the only struggle I know of, the only struggle I can think of is between the government caucus and cabinet. We saw it last year, and now Bill 2 in its current form deserves to be soundly criticized for its many deficiencies.

4:20

The Minister of Justice in introducing Bill 2 on February 2, '98, said:

Overall, most of the Tupper report recommendations are dealt with in legislation, with the exception . . .

"with the exception," and he dropped his voice when he said this, . . . of senior officials, the registration of lobbyists, apparent conflicts, and the increase in the cooling-off period from six months to 12 months.

This is akin to the White Star Line 50 years ago putting out a news release announcing that the inaugural voyage of the *Titanic* has been an outstanding success as far as Greenland. It's what's not said that's so critically important. When we look at the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, we see what's being omitted from it, what hasn't been carried forward. These aren't the minor recommendations, not the inconsequential recommendations from the eminent persons panel, the Tupper report group. What he has done is surgically removed the heart and the soul from the eminent persons panel report.

Let me just go through the things that the government has chosen not to address in terms of conflicts of interest. "Apparent conflicts": if there was anything that came from the whole sordid Multi-Corp fiasco, it was the need to do what other provinces have recognized, that you have to address apparent conflict. You have to be able to deal with the appearance of conflict. That's as important as actual conflict. Members have to be enjoined from putting themselves in a position where there's an appearance of conflict. If the Minister of Justice, the master of mischief, were genuinely concerned about public distrust and public skepticism, then that would be the first thing that that minister would want to address and to remedy. "Apparent conflicts" is found nowhere in Bill 2. We still will have standing policy chairs operating outside of the Conflicts of Interest Act.

We will still have only a six-month cooling-off period. I might just say with respect to the cooling-off period that I thought that my friend from Edmonton-Centre the other day in speaking to it made a good point. I understand why there's a great deal of discomfort with expanding the cooling-off period from six months to 12 months. This is still a relatively small province. I understand the kinds of sacrifices people make to stand for elected office, and I understand the scary prospect we all face at some point, either voluntarily or when our electors get tired of us, that then we have to make arrangements to be able to provide for our families at that point. But it seems to me that the importance of giving Albertans the degree of confidence in the integrity of our process of government dictates, absolutely dictates, an extension of the cooling-off period to one year. I mean, there are some jurisdictions that have a two-year cooling-off period, not just a one-year period. One year seemed to me to be a reasonable compromise, one that I think helps address that much needed question of public credibility.

The other recommendation which I looked in vain for in terms of inclusion in Bill 2 was the eminent persons' recommendation that we have to separate the Information Commissioner from the office of the Ethics Commissioner. Now, this is an issue that has been championed by the opposition since, I suppose, 1994. It's consistent with the initial, unanimous recommendation from the committee, which the Member for Peace River was on and other members of the Legislature who were part of the Premier's all-party panel on access to information. We unanimously recommended that the new Information and Privacy Commissioner should hold no other office. The government chose to ignore that recommendation and create an Ethics Commissioner who is conflicted by the multiple roles that he is expected to discharge.

The other problem we still have that Bill 2 doesn't in any fashion adequately address is including policy officials; in other words, deputy ministers, senior people in the government offices being subject to it. Now, the government has come up with a plan which is too clever by half. What the government has done is say: we're going to have a code that is going to cover some senior government officials. The difficulty with that so-called code is that it operates wholly collateral, wholly independent of our Conflicts of Interest Act. The commissioner, under the Conflicts of Interest Act, has no jurisdiction in terms of dealing with the senior policy officials, which seems ludicrous. If you have an individual who, firstly, has been selected because of his skill, his judgment, his life experience and who is charged with that responsibility of acting with discretion, with sound judgment, with a keen appreciation for the public interest, why wouldn't that person also be the responsible official in terms of trying to deal with conflicts on the part of senior policy officials, whether

they're deputy ministers or ADMs or other senior people in each of the government departments? Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding that, we don't see that provided for.

What we have in Bill 2 – it's not without any redeeming features. I should acknowledge that there's some broadening of disclosure responsibilities, which I think is fine. There's some clarification for that circumstance in which a member perceives a conflict of interest and some formalization of how that can be managed. That also is positive. There's certainly no problem with adding a preamble, which may be of some help, perhaps, and some assistance to the Ethics Commissioner in discharging his responsibility. And I'd never quibble with building in a statutory five-year review.

The government also deserves some minor praise for having removed that contentious section we saw in Bill 20 which would have prevented the Speaker from making the Ethics Commissioner's report public in those circumstances when the commissioner ruled the act had not been breached. So whether the government has elected to take the good advice offered by members of the opposition when Bill 20 was dealt with a year ago or they arrived at the same conclusion by independent means matters not a whit. The point is that they've done a positive thing in terms of deleting that very contentious provision.

The point I'd just come back to, because we're supposed to be dealing with Bill 2 in principle, is that if the Justice minister really thinks that Bill 2 has struck a reasonable balance, then I think all Albertans should view with some alarm the nature of the individual who is our chief law enforcement individual, the highest justice official in the province. Because if that person forms a judgment that Bill 2 strikes a reasonable balance and is going to in any meaningful way address public distrust, then that scares the bejeebes out of me, Mr. Speaker, and gives me a great deal of concern for when we get into tough, tough questions, when the government is in a tough jam and has to determine whether a minister has done something inappropriate, and that Justice minister makes a decision because we have no independent director of public prosecutions.

We rely on our Justice minister to do what amounts to sometimes a responsibility to ensure that the cabinet isn't above the law, that cabinet ministers aren't above the law. In most constitutional democracies we've evolved to the point where the Minister of Justice, or at least the Attorney General, is to some extent distanced a little bit from cabinet. It's the justice minister who in many jurisdictions, in the U.K. and some other provinces, would choose not even to attend certain cabinet meetings during a time when that Attorney General might have to decide to lay information or take some legal action against one of his colleagues, one of the ministers of cabinet.

4:30

Where I'm going with this, Mr. Speaker, is simply to say that the Minister of Justice has that very special kind of position, and it means that he more than any other of his colleagues must be alive to the potential for conflict and the importance of upholding the laws of the nation and the laws of our province. When I see him make the kinds of observations he has about Bill 2 – observations without analysis, uncritical comments on a badly deficient piece of legislation – it makes me wonder about the kind of judgment he would bring to bear in discharging his much broader and fundamentally critically important responsibilities.

So those are the points I wanted to make. I think on balance I acknowledge that there are some minor remedial elements in Bill 2, but it falls so far short of what the minister promised us, what

the government suggested in the throne speech, that one really has to wonder whether it warrants the support of any member of this Assembly, but we'll see. Perhaps the government may decide to make some substantial amendment to it and may decide to address the real concerns Albertans have, because, you know, Albertans' concerns aren't going to go away, Mr. Speaker. Regardless of what this government does with Bill 2, Albertans will still be suspicious of their own government, and that's a shame. Hopefully, we can yet do some additional remedial work.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before continuing on, may we have unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?

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

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In our gallery today I see a friend of mine, a teacher who is at a teachers' convention, who just hopped over here to see the proceedings of the Legislature and has heard some very good debate from this side of the House. She is Sara Lynne Burrows, and I would ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Second Reading**
Bill 2
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998
(*continued*)

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure this afternoon to rise and speak for a few minutes on the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act. There are a few of my colleagues that are anxious to speak on this issue, and I shall keep my remarks brief.

In this bill, the preamble sums up – it's an excellent job description for each and every one of us in this Assembly, and I think it's worth repeating, Mr. Speaker.

Members of the Legislative Assembly are expected to perform their duties of office and arrange their private affairs in a manner that promotes public confidence and trust in the integrity of each Member, that maintains the Assembly's dignity and that justifies the respect in which society holds the Assembly and its Members.

We all know, whenever we visit in our constituencies a school or a hospital, how people treat us and how they feel about us. The children in particular look up to us, each and every one of us. We must see that this continues. As they grow and become voters and taxpayers, they must have a trust and a confidence in each and every person that they elect to this Assembly. This bill, this amendment act, if it can do that, then it has a purpose.

Bill 2 I believe is necessary, but it does not follow the theme of the Tupper report. Now, it's good that the Tupper report has seen the light of day. You know, there are other reports here that we all know about that people have stood over the shredder for

days getting rid of. But the Tupper report has seen the light of day, and it is incorporated in a lot of this legislation. However, as my esteemed colleague from Calgary-*Buffalo* pointed out: there are some factors that should be considered from the Tupperware – Tupper report. Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. Where's the party? I had to work so hard to prepare for question period today that I had to pack a lunch from home.

Mr. Speaker, the chair of the standing policy committee, because of the lack of the fall session, has increased duties. This is from the Tupper report:

Under the proposed Integrity in Government and Politics Act, the obligations now imposed on Members of Executive Council and the restrictions now imposed on "former Ministers" should be extended to those Members of the Legislative Assembly who chair Standing Policy Committees.

If we don't have a fall session and we have all these standing policy committees, perhaps we should reconsider this.

There's also another, Mr. Speaker. Comments were made by the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* that the present restrictions on the activities of former ministers are legitimate safeguards of the public interest, that the existing six-month cooling-off period is too short. I think it should be 12 months. I know this government displays a memory of convenience on many issues. With this memory of convenience they've forgotten about their failed industrial strategies. They're very proud of their debt reduction, their fiscal responsibility now, but eight years ago some very destructive industrial planning caused this province a great deal of trouble. Voters had a great deal of stress; the public was concerned about this. But retired ministers can take the year and think about their political careers. Six months is not too long a cooling-off period. It is the price that a minister – every one of us, whether we're in Executive Council or not, is a public servant, and we are here to serve the public. If it means that we must have 12 months instead of the six months to think about our futures, so be it, without pay.

With that, Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner's scope, as we talk about in this bill, should not be limited. The Ethics Commissioner has a very, very important job to do, and we should not restrict him or her in any way.

With that, I would like to conclude my remarks on Bill 2 and the Tupper report.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to Bill 2 as proposed by the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, that bill of course being the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998. This particular bill refers, of course, in a broad sense to the role and duties and responsibilities of our privacy and ethics commissioner. I want to just say off the top that I've always enjoyed and appreciated the meetings that I've had with the Ethics Commissioner. I've found that office to be quite helpful, both in terms of interpreting some of the aspects surrounding my particular financial investments and holdings and that type of thing as well as some of the advice that gets provided to all members with respect to the avoidance of any difficulties that we might otherwise find ourselves in if we were not to be apprised of everything that we should be.

4:40

So I congratulate the Ethics Commissioner and his staff on doing a fairly good job, from what I've seen. I think they truly do make a sincere effort. However, I think we have to also appreciate that while they are doing a good job, they're doing it within certain confines and within certain rules and regulations which I think we could argue in this House might need to be expanded and perhaps even opened up so that more work could be explored and investigated. I'm not trying to encourage the creation of more work for the ethics office. I'm simply saying that there might be a case made for the expansion of their jurisdiction, as it were, or at least the depth of their jurisdiction. So I appreciate that the Minister of Justice is attempting to address some of that through this bill.

I want to also say in a general sense, Mr. Speaker, that I do support anything that furthers the cause of trustworthiness or cleanliness or honesty or things of that nature as they relate to elected officials. I would go to no small ends of the Earth to further the notion that elected officials must be extremely accountable, extremely just in their actions and their deeds and their behaviours, so an act like this that we see before us is more of a guideline for elected officials than it is some form of punitive measurement or ability after the fact.

I looked at the act thinking to myself that perhaps the Minister of Justice will in fact be tightening up some of the areas of difficulty and at the same time allowing an expansion, as I said, of the others. I'm not sure I found enough of those examples just yet, but I've only read the bill through once so far, and I will be paying it a little greater heed. Nonetheless, during this particular stage of the bill – as we all know, we're addressing the generalities of the bill and the basic principle and purpose of it. Matters that relate to ethical conduct of elected officials should be addressed perhaps on a much more frequent basis than they are. To not do that would definitely be a stark indictment of hypocrisy on the government and on all members of this House.

We have to attempt to produce through bills like this what I hope the public would perceive as a greater confidence in their elected officials so that there are no feelings of mistrust amongst the public insofar as their elected representatives are concerned. One thing I've learned since becoming an MLA here, Mr. Speaker, is that perception in this job is virtually everything. Reality, when and if the public ever get to the state of actually seeing the reality behind every issue – and I should say that they do in many issues, but they at least get a perception about every issue. I would say that perception in this job appears to be probably nine-tenths of what drives the public into forming an opinion about us, about our behaviour, about our very disposition. So the commonsense aspect of this bill tells me that conflicts of interest should never be taken lightly, and if we can do something to help out in that regard, we should and we must. So I looked at the bill a little bit from that standpoint in trying to understand that any disclosures of possible public conflict or conflicts of interest should be properly and thoroughly investigated.

I think we have to provide the Ethics Commissioner not only with the mandate but also with the resources necessary to do that job and provide him or her, as the case may be, with the full range of responsibilities and the full freedoms and the entire independence that is required to do a thorough job so that the public's perception and the public's reality strongly indicate that justice was done and that they are satisfied with the ethics ruling, should one become necessary. To do anything less I think derogates from our purpose here when we discuss issues like this.

I want to talk a little bit about the general purpose of the bill now, Mr. Speaker. As I see this, the purpose to the bill is to tighten up certain aspects of conflict of interest guidelines, to perhaps clear up and clarify others, at the same time perhaps to enhance the role of the commissioner, and, perhaps more importantly, to explain just exactly how it is that members can or cannot find themselves in conflict or potentially conflicting circumstances.

In the first part I like the aspect that the bill does try to tighten up the ethical aspect of, for example, Crown contracts where individuals and parties have business amongst themselves and may be connected somehow to government contracts or to organizations that are funded by the government and are perceived to be government contracts and those contracts involve members of this Assembly and/or members of their immediate family. In that respect I was interested in sort of reviewing the principle and the gist behind the section that appears on page 2, which in fact is section 5 I believe, where there is some clarification of individuals who are MLAs or connected directly as family members to an MLA and what their disposition and behaviour should be, for example, in meetings where issues might arise that would possibly put someone into a conflict position.

It always amazes me, Mr. Speaker, that we all basically, I think, as individuals in this province come through a process of having been community workers or community volunteers or somehow connected through organizations to some type of volunteer service work. You and I know that when you're involved in these community organizations, be it at the church level or in the 4-H clubs or in some community endeavour, it doesn't matter; we always have a sixth sense about ourselves as volunteers to make sure that when an issue arises during a meeting, we have the common sense, the common courtesy to, first of all, declare that we might be in a position of possible conflict. Secondly, that being the case, we abstain from any discussion, we abstain from any vote, and then we probably even might abstain from attending the rest of that meeting or at least until that particular issue is drawn up.

It always amazes me, when I come to reading more and more government legislation, that these kinds of things that I think are common sense to almost all of us, I would hope, have to actually be spelled out in the act. I think that's the gist of what has happened here in section 5, where there is a serious attempt made to clarify what it is that members must do in order to comply with this act insofar as meetings where declarations of that sort are required.

I recall, Mr. Speaker, addressing this very issue at the doors during the 1993 election, even before the election was called, and it was in response to queries about the Deficit Elimination Act. I had never heard that term until, obviously, it came up. We were all aware of the fact that there was a deficit, and we were all aware of the fact that it needed to be eliminated. I campaigned heavily on that point and I'm sure every member who ran in the '93 election did because that was a driving issue, and I would congratulate our former leader for having made that a huge issue during the '93 campaign.

But the point I'm trying to make there is that when I was trying to learn the act and then in turn explain it, it occurred to me that the easiest way to try to explain that was that it was necessary to have a Deficit Elimination Act, but it really had the effect of a government legislating itself back to honesty. That was what the community and constituents were telling me. They felt that there was a conflict of interest somehow involved there, so they started

asking me about all the different contracts that the government had given out. You will recall – and I just raise this for example, not for any other reason – NovAtel, MagCan, and all of those. “What were those contracts all about? To whom were they given? Were there any possible conflicts of interest involved?” I couldn't answer that, and to this day I still can't answer where all of those moneys went. So when and if we do get involved, such as in section 5 of this act, which talks about potential conflicts of interest, we have to be very vigilant to not take up the temptation to be involved.

4:50

The other aspect is with regard to clearing up and clarifying these contract renewals and how the Ethics Commissioner is required to review them for fair and reasonable comment, again for the purposes of protecting members from conflict but also to prevent any possible abuse of that aspect. So I think that's a good move and something that I will support.

Another important aspect of the bill in a general sense, the principle of the bill I should say, is that it tends to enhance or is intended to enhance the role of the Ethics Commissioner. During the time that I have been here, I think there have been perhaps at least half a dozen occasions where the Ethics Commissioner has been called to investigate or to rule on one thing or another. I'm not going to get into the specific examples of those, Mr. Speaker, because they do involve specific people and individuals, and I try not to fight my battles on personalities but more on issues. However, I do recall a few times when the Ethics Commissioner could not explore the particular issue or the particular member's actions or the particular member's behaviour fully enough. I think that was the term the Ethics Commissioner used. At least, that's what I read in the subsequent reports or in the subsequent stories that followed in the press, that the Ethics Commissioner could not comment on points X or Y, that he could not rule on points X or Y because it was outside his mandate.

Well, we have that opportunity here during Committee of the Whole, when we start looking at the bill on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis, to address some of those concerns. I would seriously encourage all members – I don't care what side of the House you sit on – to read some of the Ethics Commissioner's reports and rulings and see how many times he says in the report something to the effect that “That was beyond my jurisdiction,” or “That was outside the scope of my duties,” or “That is not covered in my act.” There are many, many references to that. I'm not saying that that's not just for him to say; I'm simply saying that there seems to be a pattern to some of that, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps during the subsequent stage of this particular Bill 2 we might address ourselves to some of those comments, the frequency of them, and what we could do about them. That would be one issue that I would think would help enhance and clarify the role the Ethics Commissioner would have.

It flows from that that the reason for my mentioning it is because the public has a right to know. The thing that the public really, I think, has a great difficulty with is when we leave things hanging, when we don't quite finish something off and it just sort of goes away or dies its own natural death or whatever without any real conclusion having come to it. And you could say that the ethics report – when he rules, that's the end of it. True, I would agree that it is the end of it. I accept that, and I don't push any further if I'm involved or whatever, and I don't encourage my colleagues to either.

There are oftentimes areas where questions remain unanswered. This bill has the opportunity to address and plug up some of those

loopholes so that when a decision is made, when a report is rendered and is brought into this House, that is truly the end of it. The public has a level of comfort that it's really finished because the Ethics Commissioner was given the full power, the full authority, all the resources that were required to fully round out his investigation and come to the decision that he or she would come to.

The final point with respect to the general gist and principle here talks about members and explains how it is that members are not eligible to receive any benefits from the Crown; that is to say, a benefit which is not available to members of the public given that the circumstances are the same and equal. I would hope that when that particular aspect comes up for discussion, we would have some greater explanation of what it is that we do and do not receive as a benefit that is not available to members of the public. I think that part has to be clarified, because the public could presumably be allowed a benefit from a government agency. The way it reads in the bill – I know we're not getting into the specifics here, and I'm hoping you'll not receive it that way – we should clarify that particular aspect.

Over on page 4 of the bill, section 7, there's a discussion there, Mr. Speaker, about blind trusts. I was intrigued by that because I think we all – perhaps not all, but most of us – do have one form or another of a blind trust. Now, I don't know if it's required, but somewhere the gist and principle of the bill should perhaps explain what a blind trust is, unless of course that definition and explanation exists somewhere else, and perhaps it does. I'm not sure which act it would be involved in. I looked through here to try and see if there was something that would comment on that, and I did not find it. But as I said, I've only read the bill once, so maybe I missed it, or maybe there's a reference to another bill.

Blind trusts are another area that should be clarified, because if you read the old section 12, which during Committee of the Whole no doubt we all will, you will note that there are a number of things that are included in our statements of disclosures. Then a little later on, in section 8 on page 5, there are a number of things that are excluded from public disclosures. However, in a general sense, I'm just saying that I think the bill should, if it can, talk to the gist and principle of what is meant by a blind trust. There's no definition in here, and I wonder just how arbitrary it might be. So I would pass that on to the hon. members.

Time is running out here, and I just want to say that there are a few comments I will make later with respect to the six-month cooling-off period, aspects of the bill that have been excluded, and what the compensation is vis-à-vis the cooling-off time period, but those are specifics that I think we'll need to save. I'll simply end here by saying that there are a number of exceptions spelled out in the bill, and I understand the principle of the exceptions for things like assets, liabilities, and interest holdings of a certain amount not having to be disclosed. I understand the principle behind that, but I'm not sure that the public would grasp the principle as readily, not having had the great privilege that we have of having actually worked here and having gone through the process, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the bell is about to ring, so I'll conclude simply by saying that at this stage, during second reading, I haven't yet found enough items, in my opinion, to fully support the bill, but I have found some that would cause me some concern and therefore would easily convince me not to support it in its present form. But we will have the opportunity for amendments, Mr. Speaker, and I would hope that the hon. Minister of Justice and

other members of the House would at least review the comments I've made during this stage and try to enact them.

Thank you for your attention.

5:00

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to speak to Bill 2 and wake up the minister of science and information technology.

DR. TAYLOR: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister of science, research, and information technology.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

DR. TAYLOR: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), false motives. Mr. Speaker, I was not in fact sleeping; I was listening with my eyes closed. Her actual comments were that she was going to wake up the minister of science and technology. Since I could hear them, I obviously was not sleeping. It's bad enough that I have to listen to her. Do I have to look at her as well?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, would you like to reconsider some of the last words?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, perhaps I'll withdraw those last few comments, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I should have left him sleeping. If he really wasn't sleeping, then I do apologize. The snoring kind of got to me earlier, so I did think he was. If the minister says he was truly listening, I believe him.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. I would say that the point of order has been accepted and taken by the hon. member, because of course the hon. member is obliged for a variety of reasons to speak the truth.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert in continuance on Bill 2.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always my pleasure to stand in this Assembly and speak to pieces of legislation that are before us. I must express, naturally, some disappointment in this legislation. There are some good things, but certainly I think it should have some more beef, some Alberta beef, and teeth to it. It's no wonder, you know, that people don't hold politicians in too high esteem. There are all kinds of jokes about politicians. [interjections] And lawyers too, I'm very sorry to say, but lots about politicians. I'm really sorry, Minister of Education, mentioning the lawyer thing too. That's a double whammy. I don't mean to be casting aspersions.

Those jokes are humorous, and we can all take them, but underneath that is maybe a subtle truth about how people regard politicians. I know we should all be working towards changing

that image: to be accountable, to not be afraid, to be willing to be carefully scrutinized. It's not easy sometimes living in a fishbowl, but that's the reality of politics, and I think we have to accept that. If we're going to accept that, we have to make this Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act stronger.

MR. MAR: Microscopes are okay, but no proctoscope, please.

MRS. SOETAERT: No what?

MR. MAR: Proctoscope.

Speaker's Ruling Addressing the Chair

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member would be reminded that technically you're speaking through the Speaker and not to other people and therefore should not respond to extraneous noises that inappropriately may be made from time to time.

MRS. SOETAERT: You're right. The Minister of Education is an extraneous noise, and I will do my best to ignore him. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that correction.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: I want to talk about a few things that I would have liked to have seen in this bill. One of the things that I thought was definitely missing in this was the cooling-off period. At present it's six months. One of the recommendations in the Tupper report was that that cooling-off period be 12 months. In many ways the six-month cooling-off period is kind a Tory make-work job program. There seems to be a lot of job opportunities for Conservative members who have left this House or have been in high-profile spots under the six-month cooling period. Now, they may be excellent people for the jobs. That's not what I'm saying. But if we want to be without conflict, to keep our integrity, why don't we respect what this Tupper report suggested and make it a year of cooling off?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Because he's wrong; that's why.

MRS. SOETAERT: The minister of public works says that Mr. Tupper is wrong. In fact, this Tupper report was put together at the request of this government, and a fine job they did. So when they set up a task force or a report or a review committee, I guess they don't want to listen to him, which is obvious by the minister's comments. However, I would suggest that was one that should have been in here.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that seniors in government should be under this legislation. Deputy ministers . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Senior government officials.

MRS. SOETAERT: Senior government officials, not just senior people. Thank you for clarifying that.

Senior government officials should be included in this act. That I don't think they would object to. I think that if they are working closely with ministers to do the work that the government is entrusted with, they should be quite open and accountable as well.

One thing I do like in this legislation is that now the Leader of the Opposition is under the same limitations as cabinet ministers. That I think is very good and certainly isn't a problem from this side of the House. So I would support that.

Another thing that I thought was very important that isn't in here is that there should be a lobbyist registry. I think that would be something that this government shouldn't be afraid of, so I'm surprised it's not in here.

The other thing that I've mentioned before in this Legislature – and if I mention it often enough, it might just become legislation some day; I've seen that happen on a few other things – is that the Ethics Commissioner and the Information and Privacy Commissioner should be two separate jobs. They're very big jobs, and there should be two. That's no disrespect to Mr. Clark, whom I very much respect. That isn't any reflection on him, but it certainly at times would seem like a conflict of interest for him. So I think that's very difficult.

Standing policy chairs. There are several here. I know that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake wouldn't mind at all being under this legislation. I'm sure he could stand here and say, "You know what? I have no problems. My integrity should be intact. I'll go under this legislation." And I hope he has the opportunity to do that. I'm sure he may suggest it, in fact, during committee. I would suggest that standing policy chairs should be included in this act. I don't think there should be any problem with that. There shouldn't be any problem with that.

A couple of other things. If the senior officials were included – and it says spouses too – we wouldn't have issues like the scandalous Multi-Corp thing that was in the headlines so much a year or so ago. It's too bad that had to happen, because once again, then, the integrity of all politicians is questioned when those kinds of things come up.

If I may quote just a paragraph from the Tupper report that I found quite powerful:

Laws designed to promote integrity in government are essential to the quality of democracy. But they are not, and must not be seen to be, substitutes for an alert, informed public. As the 1990 report of Chief Judge Wachowich put it: "However admirable a conflicts of interest system might be, it could not reform a corrupt government or protect an apathetic public."

So we have to make this stronger, but it's not the be-all and end-all. We know that.

As always, I guess legislation can't be perfect, but we should always strive to make it better. I guess it's the opposition's responsibility to inform the public about what reform is needed in government and what is going on. That is part of our job as well, and that's why we sit in this Legislature, to make the public aware. That's part of all of our roles.

5:10

Just a closing remark. I am pleased to see some things in this bill, but certainly some of the highlights of the Tupper report have not been included, and that's disappointing. Mr. Speaker, this bill is a reflection of all of us and the integrity that we have as politicians. For the benefit of the minister responsible for science and technology I may share, if you will allow me, a joke I heard about politicians. It's very proper of course.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It's on the bill?

MRS. SOETAERT: Oh, yes. It's about integrity and politicians, but if the Speaker doesn't want to hear it on this late Thursday afternoon, I can respect that. I think it does reflect how politicians are regarded and how we have to work at that and, by this piece of legislation, we can improve that.

It was a little article I read, and I think I've told it here before, but there are some new members who might enjoy it. A minister and a politician died and went to heaven, and St. Peter gave the

minister a very nice room, but he gave the politician a room with a view by the sea, cable TV – you know, when you're from rural Alberta, that's something special – a Jacuzzi, a hot tub. It was just a beautiful room. The minister said to St. Peter: "What's going on here? I'm a minister, and he's a politician." St. Peter said, "Well, you see, ministers up here are a dime a dozen, but this is the first politician we've ever had." Ha, ha, ha. Thank you.

The point of this is that we cannot think we are above the law; we have to be part of it. We have to be open to scrutiny so that our integrity is intact and so that the general public has some sense of trust in politicians and that the image of politicians is improved.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[At 5:14 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

