

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, February 9, 1998 1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/02/09
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Let us pray.

As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving both our province and our country.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 11,000 St. Albert area residents that ask that other transportation alternatives to the west bypass be investigated.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petitions I presented last week be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

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

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to reduce the grants of public money to private schools to \$0.00.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to amend the Legislative Assembly Act in such a manner as to make it mandatory for the Government to hold two sittings of the Legislature each year, in the Spring and the Fall.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 15 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 1998

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill being the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 1998.

[Leave granted; Bill 15 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 15 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file a public service announcement recognizing the 1998 Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival. This four-day festival runs from February 11 to 14 and caps off with cross-country ski events. They had a record turnout last year, and I encourage Albertans to participate and make this Valentine's Day one that truly is good for the heart.

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

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I am tabling four copies of a report that outlines voter turnout by constituency in the 1997 provincial election, demonstrating that a full third of the Tory caucus was elected with a lower voter turnout than many municipal elections in this province.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table with the Assembly four copies of a letter that I've written to one of my constituents, Colleen Ring, who is responsible for having initiated and ushered in the random acts of kindness project to the province of Alberta. This is now a worldwide event, and I'm so happy that this province, through the initiative of this outstanding constituent, was able to focus on this particular project that does so much good for us and for the children of Alberta. It's in addition to the information tabled by the hon. Minister of Community Development last week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today four copies of the responses to written questions and motions for returns for the First Session of the 24th Legislature, the written questions being 2, 3, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, and 36 and motions for returns 19, 20, 21, 22, and 24.

Thank you.

MRS. BLACK: It's with pleasure that I file with the Assembly four copies of the response to Motion for a Return 40 for the last session, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with being an open and accountable government, I'm pleased to table four copies of the department's responses to recommendations from fatality inquiries conducted for children who died in the care of child welfare dating back to 1990. There were 23 fatality inquiries, 15 of which had no recommendations because the deaths were accidental or due to natural causes.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table four copies of the 21st annual convention booklet of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. It's entitled Fairness First: Fair Play, Fair Pay.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to table four copies

of responses to written questions 9 and 10 accepted during the last sitting of the Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling five copies each of returns, the first one being Order for a Return 30. The request was for all loan guarantee agreements between the government of Alberta, Ribbon Creek alpine village, Pocaterra Development, and Kananaskis. I indicated that I would pursue permission to release these on the commercial confidentiality side; that permission has been granted. I'll be tabling that along with returns related to participating debentures between the government and Ridley Grain Ltd.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling four copies of letters dated December 22, 1997, that I've written to the hon. minister responsible for children's services indicating the concerns in deficiencies with the funding model as it was indicated the other day that we hadn't done that.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly eight members of local 312A, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, who are on leave of absence from their jobs: Al Williamson, Shane Svenkeson, Joseph Spano, Larry Swanson, Don Colangelo, Nic Dardano, Shelby Bishop, and Remi Morin. They are in the members' gallery. If they would rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm very please to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly nine Albertans who have made an outstanding contribution to the development of public libraries in Alberta. I will ask them to stand as I introduce them. First is Keith Turnbull, who chaired the Public Library Review Committee, whose recommendations have contributed to Bill 4. With Keith are members of this committee: Mike Dawson, Pat Jobb, Jennifer Martison, Sharon McMullan-Baron. In addition I'd like to introduce Mary Totman, president of the Alberta Library Trustees' Association; Pilar Martinez, who is president of the Library Association of Alberta; and Lucy Pana, who is executive director of The Alberta Library. I'd like all members to give these fine people a very warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you have an introduction?

1:40

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House students from a class on social policy at Grant MacEwan College. Their instructor Mr. Duane Massing I think is there as well. I would ask the guests to stand up and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly eight members of the Hunting Hills high school robotics team. This team participated in the sixth international beam robot games held in Lucknow, India. They competed against universities and other countries that were invited to the games. It is my understanding that they were the only Canadian high school team to be invited to these games. They took home five firsts, three seconds, and won the overall championship at the games. It was an outstanding achievement, and we're proud of these students. I would like to introduce them to you: Curtis Badry, Jeremy Makila, Randy Fix, Justin Barca, Stephen Rutherford, Jim Lytle, Derek Skjaveland, and Russ Michayluk. With them is their teacher and team leader, Carl Dyke, who spent many Saturdays at the school - I was privileged to go and watch him one Saturday - and their principal, Mr. Dick Hornby. If we could please give them the traditional warm welcome.

head: **Oral Question Period**
VLT Plebiscites

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier and the Treasurer couldn't seem to agree on whether or not we need video slot machine money for the budget, but now, upping the ante, the advanced education minister has decided to openly challenge the Premier's policy to hold a VLT plebiscite at the municipal level because he thinks the voter turnout is too low to legitimize those votes. Ironically one-third of this Conservative caucus was elected with a voter turnout lower than that in many municipal elections across this province. To the Premier: is the Premier in agreement with his advanced education minister that it's okay to elect municipal officials and even some of his own members with a low voter turnout but it's not okay to make decisions about money with a low voter turnout? It's money first, people second all over again.

MR. KLEIN: Well, as I understand it, Mr. Speaker, there was only one part of that diatribe that actually had a question. The answer to the question is no.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Premier could answer this question: which is more democratic, a plebiscite where everybody who wants to has the opportunity to participate or a gambling summit where the very small number of participants are chosen by this government?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the summit to which the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes is part of a review, and that indeed was one of the recommendations in the Gordon report, that the whole issue of gambling in this province should be reviewed in the context of the report by the end of August of this year. So the summit is part of that review.

A recommendation also contained in the report was the recommendation that the issue of VLTs specifically be decided through municipal plebiscites if indeed the municipalities want to have those plebiscites. There have been to my knowledge four or five plebiscites in the province thus far. In Rocky Mountain House the people voted to have the VLTs removed; they were removed. In Sylvan Lake the people voted to have the VLTs removed; they were removed. In Lacombe the people voted to have the VLTs removed; that has been challenged in court. It is the same case in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Again the people there voted to have them removed, and that is being challenged in court, Mr. Speaker. In Barrhead there was a plebiscite on VLTs, and the people in that community voted to leave the VLTs as they are.

Mr. Speaker, I have no problems with municipalities voting on this issue. As a matter of fact, it is a recommendation contained in the Gordon report. This government, notwithstanding the individual opinion of a member, has agreed to accept the recommendations of that report.

MR. MITCHELL: Judy Gordon for advanced education minister, Mr. Speaker. She knows that issue. She won't contradict the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier simply skirt his caucus' and cabinet's internal divisions on this issue and hold a province-wide, provincially administered plebiscite and let Albertans decide? What's he afraid of?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, at least we're consistent. We're consistent as a government with our support of the Gordon recommendation, and that is to allow municipalities to decide this issue on the basis of community standards prevailing. It was the municipal leaders themselves who recommended that this recommendation be brought forward. Now, I don't know how the Liberal caucus works, and I probably don't want to know, but notwithstanding an adopted government position I have never been the kind of individual or leader who prevents my caucus members from saying what they feel.

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

Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second quarter report of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund indicates a \$130 million credit impairment provision regarding the Al-Pac loan. However, the taxpayers of Alberta have never yet received an explanation that is sufficient regarding this potential write-down. In fact, while Goepel Shields of Vancouver were conducting the evaluation of this loan for the government, the Premier and the Treasurer were both reassuring Albertans that Al-Pac would be paid back to taxpayers in full. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. How much did that Goepel Shields report and evaluation on Al-Pac cost Alberta taxpayers?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of preambles in the preamble that actually had nothing to do with the question, and for the member to suggest that there's been something written off on this loan is simply inaccurate. Our accounting principles say and suggest to us that if it at all looks as if interest is not forthcoming on a particular loan, that is written down in the budget but not written off. The company, the entity itself, is still on the books and is still required to fulfill all elements of that particular contract. If there is to be a deal with Al-Pac related to any kind of provision and when that deal, if there is a deal, is completed, all information related to it including the cost of any private-sector appraisals will be openly put out before the people.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I thought I had asked: how much did it cost? But perhaps it wasn't understood that way.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Provincial Treasurer if the proposed \$260 million sale of this \$390 million loan is based on

the pessimistic case scenario, the base case scenario, or the optimistic case scenario as described by Goepel Shields in their report.

1:50

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I just have to again deal with the preamble because the member suggested that all he did was ask a simple question. No, he did not ask a simple question. He put out four very clear inaccuracies, and then he followed with a question. I dealt with the inaccuracies, and I dealt with the question.

Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, if a deal goes through – and I underline the word “if” – all elements of that particular deal will be made known.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I want to conclude by asking the hon. Provincial Treasurer if he will release the entire Goepel Shields report instead of the highly edited version, which contains 85 deleted passages.

MR. DAY: Well, I'll try for the third time. I don't know what letter in the word “yes” it is that he doesn't recognize, Mr. Speaker, but if a deal is concluded, we have said that we will release all elements of that deal.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Provincial Budget

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past four years this government has spent almost a million dollars on polls conducted by Longwoods International of Toronto relating to Alberta fiscal issues. The Provincial Treasurer has a copy of a November 1997 Longwoods poll in his department that he's refused to release. I would like to remind the Treasurer that the Premier, appearing before a legislative committee, in talking about polls said:

Polls that certainly elicit the public's view on certain policy issues . . . I have no problem making sure that the results of those polls or surveys are made public, because they are indeed funded publicly through taxpayers' dollars.

My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, why is it that the Provincial Treasurer is failing to release this report and contravening your policy?

MR. KLEIN: I really don't know, Mr. Speaker, but I'll have the hon. Provincial Treasurer respond.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that perfectly in line with the Premier's comment and commitment all of those numbers and costs are released. That's been done each year, and this year will be no exception. When a poll of that nature is done specifically related to the budget as advice to the Treasurer in terms of budget items, that is included in terms of how a budget is developed. To release certain information before a budget that might not have been released to this date could create difficulties. So once the budget process is done, that will be released as in the past.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: when the government spends \$75,000 of taxpayer money on a speech that announces \$641 million in spending prior to the budget, why do taxpayers have to wait to get the same kind of information because it comes from a poll?

MR. KLEIN: Well, it seems to me that question is somewhat redundant, Mr. Speaker, but again I will have the hon. Treasurer respond.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy again to respond. Information like this, which has not been released to date – and the reason we did release some information is because we work with partners in this province. We work in a partnership collaborative process with municipalities, with regional health authorities, with school boards. So it's necessary, we feel, to release to them as much information as we can during their own budget process. Their budget years don't always coincide with ours, and their necessity to know certain things is on different time lines than ours, so certain of that information is released to them beforehand so they can more adequately work within their own budget context.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the Premier: why is it that you won't commit to release to the public information that relates to the formation of this budget like you do all the rest even when you release parts of it?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Provincial Treasurer has already committed that the information being sought by the hon. member will be released.

THE SPEAKER: Third party main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Advanced Education Tuition Fees

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Calgary board of governors reluctantly decided last week that tuition fees for undergraduates will go up once again by another \$260 in the next academic year, an 8.2 percent increase, which is more than five times the rate of inflation. This means that starting in September of this year, the typical full-time student will be paying \$3,440 in tuition fees alone to attend the University of Calgary. My question is to the minister of advanced education. How many more years of massive increases of almost \$300 a year will Alberta university students have to endure before the government's tuition cap of 30 percent of net operating cost is reached? How many years?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, in answer to the hon. member's question, it will depend on the institution. Now, he's raised the University of Calgary, so we will deal with that. As we stand here today, my understanding is that the University of Calgary is at approximately 24 percent of net operating cost. This'll move them up I believe to 27 percent, so it'll still leave them 3 percent short of the cap that would be placed at 30 percent. We have other institutions in this province that are already approaching that 30 percent, so you won't see the sort of increases at that scale that we're currently seeing at the University of Calgary and perhaps likely at the University of Alberta.

The tuition policy has been fairly clear. We've been very open and forthright, not only with students but certainly with other administrators, and we believe the policy is a fair one. We believe it is most important that the student who is having the best gain from the quality of education that they're getting – this is the best investment they'll ever make.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, that's cold comfort for students who have to pay these high fees to go to universities and colleges here.

Mr. Speaker, based on figures provided by the universities themselves, tuition fees will need to increase by another \$1,300 to \$1,400 a year per student at both of Alberta's major universities before they reach 30 percent of net operating costs. How can the minister justify placing such an undue financial burden on Alberta's current and future postsecondary students?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I guess there's a couple of things that we want to make sure are clear. First of all, the policy of this government regarding tuition fees is that those that have the ability to pay should pay, and we think that is sound.

The other thing we would want to make note of is that with the increasing tuitions in Alberta, it's putting us a little higher in the average across Canada, but we're certainly not leading and we're certainly not following. Where the issue comes in and what our government is addressing itself to isn't so much the front end of it in terms of tuition but in terms of student debt. To that end, I'm sure you will have agreed with us by now that the Alberta opportunity bursary that we have announced is a tremendous step toward reducing student debt in this province.

DR. PANNU: It's ironic, Mr. Speaker, that this government wants to go above the national average in terms of tuition fee rates, while it wants to spend below the average in terms of spending on education and health. Given that the total dollar increase in tuition fees over the next five years will be even larger than those of the past five years and given that in a recent survey by the minister's own department two-thirds of grade 12 students said that postsecondary education is already too expensive, how can the minister justify saddling students currently in high schools and junior high schools with the full brunt of this government's wrong-headed tuition policy and unbearable debt burdens?

MR. DUNFORD: Once again, Mr. Speaker, we believe it is the responsibility of students and their parents to invest in a high quality and a high standard of postsecondary education in this province. We do not feel that 30 percent is an unreasonable amount to ask for. What we have done in the past and will continue to do in the future is ensure that those that find themselves in financial need will receive assistance from our government.

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

2:00 Health Services in the North

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health. At the Alberta Growth Summit health care was identified by Albertans as a top priority. Recent announcements were made regarding additional funding being allocated to RHAs across the province. Fort McMurray in the Northern Lights RHA received an additional 1 percent of that funding formula. Now, in light of the continued tremendous growth pressures we're experiencing in northern communities both east and west and specifically in Fort McMurray, with an expansion of \$16 billion of announcements in oil sands, sometimes formulas with one-size-fits-all don't necessarily work and need to be reviewed. Can the minister consider reviewing the funding formula in light of these tremendous growth pressures?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly the member is correct, and

he knows best in terms of the growth being experienced in Fort McMurray.

With respect to the formula, Mr. Speaker, it is a population-based funding formula. It recognizes the actual increase in population and also builds in factors recognizing the relative costs of a younger population versus an older. I could go through a number of the other factors involved.

However, with respect to Fort McMurray, Mr. Speaker, when we went to the population-based funding formula, there were a number of regional health authorities, Northern Lights included, that according to the formula were being funded above what the formula would yield for other regional health authorities. However, we made a decision to grandfather or to protect those regions and keep them with their level of funding. The Northern Lights regional health authority board, I think, are aware of that and should be planning with the budget that they have before them.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question. An article appeared in our local *Fort McMurray Today* newspaper with the RHA board saying that with the growth pressures in the region, they're predicting a million dollar deficit by year-end. The funding formula is providing \$223,000. Is the minister considering again reviewing the formula in light of the tremendous pressures being faced based on the numbers being used here?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that since we are now dealing with specific amounts of money, we should recognize that there's also an additional amount of money that's allocated to the regional health authorities for equipment or for capital expenditure, which raises the amount somewhat for Fort McMurray. Certainly I commend the hon. member for representing his constituency and its growth and its needs.

As he is aware because he was instrumental in it, we have recognized the growth pressures in Fort McMurray with some special funding to recruit physicians, and, Mr. Speaker, certainly when I meet with the Northern Lights regional health authority in the next few weeks, I will be hearing their concerns and discussing them with them.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental was on that topic the minister had made reference to, that he is committing to meet with the RHA officials as they requested of me to ask of the minister pertaining to this very serious emerging problem.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray, *Beauchesne* 428(e) precludes the opportunity of hon. members to raise questions in question period determining the veracity of statements made in newspapers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Disease Control

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, last year the Minister of Health dismantled Alberta's centralized disease control program. He fired 30 percent of the staff who track and monitor and help treat the deadliest diseases that we face. Now, last month the Capital health authority medical officer of health reported a 24 percent increase in the number of HIV infection cases. Did the Minister of Health know about the dramatic increase in the number of HIV

cases before he announced funding for the regional health authorities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I do not recall receiving those particular statistics. However, given the prelude to the question, I can assure the Assembly that in terms of our communicable diseases unit, yes, we did revamp and streamline that particular part of our department, as we did many things within the department. However, we are still operating effectively there. We have expert advice on call, and that is certainly a service that is being maintained.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, is the reason that the Minister of Health did absolutely nothing to address this growing concern because of his lack of awareness because he dismantled the central disease control program?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised the Minister of Health wants to be flippant about this.

Given that this is a provincial program and a provincial problem and not just a regional one, would the Minister of Health please tell us, tell this Assembly, and tell the people facing this disease what immediate steps you're taking to deal with the growth in the infection rate and the growing concern about those infected developing AIDS? What are you doing right now in this region to deal with the problem?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do have, as the hon. member I think knows, initiatives within the department with respect to HIV and AIDS. In addition to that, during the next few weeks we'll be announcing additional measures to allow us to better report and control that particular disease.

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

Boiler Safety

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Auditor General's 1996-97 annual report he noted his concerns with the growth of the backlog of inspections of boilers and pressure vessels. This is since the privatization of pressure vessels inspection, which occurred in 1995. I'm addressing this issue out of concern because even a low-pressure boiler explosion in a building where people live or work can indeed be very serious. My questions are all to the Minister of Labour. Can the Minister of Labour tell this House how many uninspected pressure vessels there are in Alberta today?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I can indeed and would like to also add some important information to that, first recognizing the importance of the Auditor General's comments not only to this delegated administrative organization but also to the other organizations that are doing an effective job of ensuring continued health and safety for the Alberta workplace as well as its consumers.

The Auditor General referred to the first six months of operation of the Alberta Boilers Safety Association. The backlog grew from 47,000 pressure vessels needing inspection to over 48,200 vessels. As of December 31, 1997, I'm pleased to report to the House and to members that the backlog was down to 38,435

vessels. This is a reduction of about 10,000. The public business plan of the safety association projects that the backlog will be eliminated within four years, and this of course was noted in the Auditor General's report. The reduction in vessels needing inspection has been accomplished during a period, as you know, of significant economic growth. In the past year alone the number of pressure vessels in the province grew by 6.2 percent from 77,000 to over 82,000.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Labour tell this House what he is doing to ensure that this backlog is cleared up?

MR. SMITH: Firstly, Mr. Speaker, the ABSA, Alberta Boilers Safety Association, has increased the number of inspectors, technical people, from a staff of 24 in 1995 to over 40 today, an increase of two-thirds, or 66 percent. These qualified inspectors are carrying out over 1,400 inspections per month. In 1995-96 ABSA did 11,864 inspections. In '96-97 they did 17,100 inspections, an increase of about 44 percent. So you can see that the private sector is tackling a plan through a coherent business plan, then working with their key customers, and taking a very customer-focused approach to this important issue for Albertans.

2:10

MR. YANKOWSKY: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Labour assure Albertans that the buildings that they live in, that they work in are safe and not in danger of a faulty boiler?

MR. SMITH: Great question, Mr. Speaker, because in fact . . . [interjections] It's easy to laugh if you haven't been out on the front line. It's easy to laugh and make light of safety in the workplace. This department, this member: we don't do that. And I'm glad we don't because there were over 85 incidents involving pressure vessels in 36 months prior to the ABSA coming into play. Twenty-three people were injured, and there were seven fatalities. In the 29 months, two and a half years, since the safety association has started, there have been 68 incidents, 15 injuries, and I think the association is extremely proud to report that there have been no fatalities.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that the public know and members hear that boilers in public and private buildings are the first priority of the safety association and the first priority of the Department of Labour. These pressure vessels get first priority for inspection. The number of boilers in public facilities that are overdue for inspection by two years or more has dropped by nearly 50 percent. So it's clear: plan your work and work your plan; privatization works.

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

Minimum Wage

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in the country. It has not been increased since 1992. The employment standards regulation review released recently by the Department of Labour indicates a serious division in government policy and thinking. The Premier, the Minister of Labour, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, who chairs this review, all have stated that the minimum wage will not be scrapped. Meanwhile, government MLAs speaking at the standing policy committee in November said: no regulation is

effective. My questions today are to the Minister of Labour. Who are we to believe, the Premier, your department, the chair of the committee, or those who spoke up against the minimum wage at the standing policy committee?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I'd be extremely comfortable if the member believed everything that he heard, because when he talks about this, he talks about debate, and that's why the standing policy committee submission was held completely in public. It was an open presentation, just as a question brought up in the Legislature stimulates public debate, just as the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort was on a radio show last week.

Just to correct a couple of erroneous assumptions made in the preamble. The net effect of minimum wage in Alberta is not the lowest in the land. In fact, we are not predisposed to collect provincial income tax from those who earn the minimum wage. There is no government obligation there. So, in fact, we're in the middle of the pack.

He's right; it was 1992 when the last adjustment was made. I believe this government's administration is absolutely right by entering into the debate, asking for the standing policy committee submissions, asking for the questions to be asked, having regulations and packages mailed out to thousands of Albertans, looking for submissions from university students, from all those who not only pay the minimum wage but collect the minimum wage. I look forward to the debate.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Labour. In this questionnaire that you are mailing out to Albertans, if you take the time to read it, question 4(a) states "Should Alberta have a minimum wage?" Explain that question, please.

MR. SMITH: "Should" would be an adverb, Mr. Speaker, that I think starts this prepositional sentence. "Have" would be the operative verb. "Alberta" is the name of the province in which the minimum wage is discussed. A "minimum wage" is to be discussed either from an economic perspective or from a social perspective. So I think again the question is simply a matter of self-evident explanation and examination by the hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why not raise the minimum wage immediately and reduce the small business tax from 6 percent to 4 percent? This business tax . . .

MR. SMITH: You asked the question.

THE SPEAKER: I have to admit that on the basis of the performance Thursday last, when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar raised the question and the hon. Minister of Labour was quick on his feet to respond to it. So proceed.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the member's submission to the public debate. He knows where he can deposit his submission.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Child and Family Services Authorities

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last December the government announced changes to the regional health boundaries

to better reflect the areas being served by the health authorities. The changes affect eight of the 17 health authorities. My question is to the minister without portfolio responsible for children's services. What effect will these health boundary changes have on the regional boundaries for child and family services?

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much. First of all, Mr. Speaker, there was a determination made to follow regional health boundaries when consultations were carried throughout the communities in Alberta when the child and family services authorities would be created. It was during those consultations that people indicated they would like to see the coterminous boundaries occur, just so that services for children and families would be even better served in terms of service delivery.

We have maintained that direction, Mr. Speaker. We are going to follow the lead set by health authorities. This means that the new child and family services authorities, when they are appointed for regions 9 and 10, will plan and deliver services within the same boundaries used by health authorities.

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: more specifically, in view of the major boundary changes that were mentioned in regions 9 and 10, how will this transition be made for the communities of Crossroads and Capital; that is regions 9 and 10? I know that the two regions are well on their way in the planning process.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, that's a very important question for the communities that have been involved in this community planning process. They have been working very hard to ensure that seamless service will occur with children and families. What we want to do is make sure that whatever transfer takes place will take into consideration those changes as we move forward to appointing those authorities. It's very important that those steering committee members and the co-chairs meet to discuss this and to plan to see what needs to be done to ensure that smooth delivery will occur.

MR. JOHNSON: My final supplemental: what measures are being considered to co-ordinate the work of the health authority and the children's services authority in the same zone? For example, could one or more individuals serve on both committees at the same time, or could, in fact, a health authority serve as a children's authority?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, that's an excellent question, Mr. Speaker, because I think it's really important as we move towards this community-based system that the people have at least some form of ability to be able to work together. One of the most important parts of children's services is the integration. We want to ensure that school boards, hospital boards, and the child and family services authorities will be able to work together in an integrated fashion to better serve the needs of the community. I think it's really important when we look at that because when we talk about legislation, there is nothing in the legislation that says we can't do that. I'd encourage, as we move forward, that we look at this kind of a system, of how it can be done to better meet the needs of the community.

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

Midwifery

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's own Advisory Council on Women's Issues along with many other community and health groups and individuals have repeatedly asked the government to recognize midwifery as a professional occupation, establish regulations and licensing regarding midwives and midwifery, and three, fund midwifery services under health care. The government has accomplished the first two. My questions are to the Minister of Health. Why won't the minister properly fund a safe alternative in childbirth that can reduce hospital stays and C-sections and improve infant birth weight?

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member may be aware, Alberta Health has had available some \$800,000 to provide for the planning and start-up of midwifery services should an agreement through a regional health authority be arrived at for this particular professional service. It seems to me that that is a feasible approach. In addition to the various advantages of midwifery that are put forward, one of them is that there is an overall cost saving involved with respect to utilizing these services. So it would seem logical to me that regional health authorities would look carefully at these pilot funds, and the government stands ready to fund such initiatives.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. That wasn't really an answer.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, get going.

MS BLAKEMAN: Sorry.

Will the minister have the plan ready for midwifery funding before all of our trained midwives leave the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we are about to conclude, as I understand it, following through on the licensing of midwives in the province. Once again, as I've said, we are quite prepared to provide the start-up, the initial funding, if it's chosen by an RHA to move ahead, to provide for midwives being part of the overall professional staff team of the regional health authorities.

In terms of the attractions of other provinces, I do not anticipate that we would be able at any time to match the money being offered in British Columbia, which I understand is significantly higher than that which would be offered to a doctor for the same service.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Given that the \$800,000 offered to the RHAs was not enough to launch pilot projects, will the minister at least commit to funding the pilot project as proposed recently by the association for midwifery?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think it is very important that the utilization of midwives, if or when it comes about, should be as part of the overall operation of a regional health authority so there is the teamwork approach of the overall staff towards this very important service. I am not anticipating and I do not think it is the way to go, as I understand the proposal referred to by the hon. member, to set up another fee-for-service pool separate and distinct from the rest of the system.

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

Provincial Budget (continued)

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reflecting questions raised in recent meetings with some of my constituents, I would like to direct my questions to the Provincial Treasurer. Our government is well known for staying on course, accountability, and financial prudence. Reading from the Speech from the Throne, it looks like the government is on a spending spree while we are still in debt. Can the Treasurer explain the reason for those increases in government spending?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, it shows the challenge that we face in government and in politics. Indeed there are people who suggest we are spending too much, and then there are people like the Liberals who suggest that a billion dollar increase isn't enough and you've got to go crazy and spend more. So it's a very difficult challenge.

In terms of justification, we've been talking to the people of Alberta, listened carefully, and through other more formal processes like the Growth Summit, a message that we've received very clearly is that there needs to be spending if it's related to the pressures of growth. The Alberta advantage is working very well. We had a growth in the economy last year of about 5.5 percent. That means more students in schools. That means more seniors actually moving into the province, notably from British Columbia because our benefits are better and the cost of living here is lower. We have more trucks on the road. We have more cars on the road. That means infrastructure demands. So again, Albertans, informally through our discussions with MLAs and through formal processes like the Growth Summit, have said that where there is pressure as a result of growth in priority areas like health and education and infrastructure, deal with those pressures. That's what we're doing.

MR. CAO: Mr. Speaker, my second and last question is again to the Treasurer. With the potential base of public revenue being somewhat softened, what are the measures that the government has taken or plans to take to ensure that public expenditures are met without going into debt?

MR. DAY: Well, the member is quite accurate, Mr. Speaker. There is a softening on the revenue side, certainly with oil prices being lower than they were a year ago and with certain challenges that we face on the Asian markets and what that means to our own manufacturers with the dollar exchange rate moving up and down. Clearly, there is a softening in terms of our revenue picture.

The economy itself we project to still grow through '98, but our own revenues indeed will be softened somewhat. So what have we put in place to protect ourselves from that? We made it very clear in the announcement on the increases in infrastructure spending that those would be one time. Year to year we'll analyze how much money we have. If the money is there after first putting a billion dollars on the debt, then we'll look at one-time infrastructure. There are also levers in place in the budget process so that, for instance, if population growth does not continue, then the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health know very well that dollars that have been allocated specifically based on population growth would not continue to flow. I think we've got some levers in place; we think we have some precautions in place so that we can maintain the budget.

THE SPEAKER: Considering that we may be anticipating the

future Speech from the Throne debate later today and the budget speech later in the week, I think we'll move on to the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the Member for St. Albert.

Day Care Subsidies

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan to eliminate the day care operating allowance is ill conceived and uninformed. Parents and child care educators across the province are voicing their opposition to this veiled attack on quality, accessible child care for Alberta's children. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: how many families earning those high income levels that you referred to last week have their children in day care? Is that less than 1 percent, 2 percent? How many in the \$100,000 to \$300,000 range?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for bringing this issue forward again. In July of this year we made a government decision to take day care subsidies, to take the operating allowance, and give it to the people of Alberta who deserve it the most, who need it the most. The question was asked: what percentage of people are from the \$100,000 to \$300,000? I don't know the exact number, but I can give you some examples. At Canada Place Child Care Centre, as I stated last week, there are presently 681 nonsubsidized children to 92 subsidized children. The maximum subsidy rate where a family will receive subsidy is a net of \$42,000, which makes a gross salary of somewhere around \$60,000 per year.

MS OLSEN: To the same minister: what information does the government have regarding nonsubsidized parents? Where do you get your information?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, where we receive our information from is the cheques that go out to the individual day cares. The individual day cares are required to put in the amount for operating allowance as well as for child care subsidy.

MRS. SOETAERT: He should know the numbers.

MS OLSEN: That's true. Indeed, he should know the numbers.

My final question to the Minister of Family and Social Services is: what consultation has the minister done with parents and professionals in the child care field to determine the impact the elimination of the operating allowance will have?

2:30

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, since the time of announcing this in July, we have heard from numerous interested parties. The majority of the parties that we have heard from are actually the day care operators themselves. As we had stated, the money is being shifted from the operating allowance to the day care subsidy. In the 1998-99 budget there will be no net difference in the amount of dollars being paid to day care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Serious and Violent Offenders

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Edmonton Police Service put out a public warning about a twice-convicted, untreated pedophile whom they determined to be on our Edmonton streets. This man, described by police as a situation offender, represents a risk to the public because of his

refusal to seek treatment and accept responsibility for his crimes. He's even reported to have told his landlord that he applied for a job at a city day care centre and that he has a background in day care work. To the Minister of Justice: in light of this very disturbing situation how is it possible that we let these unrepentant, dangerous people out of custody?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're certainly concerned about this issue, but it needs to be brought to the member's attention and the House's attention that in the case being referred to, the offender had been serving a sentence of 729 days at the Calgary Correctional Centre, two years less a day. His sentence ended on January 3, and thus he was released. At the time we did have some concerns about the release of this individual and made those concerns known to the police pursuant to our serious and violent crime strategy. That strategy seeks maximum time in custody for serious and violent offenders. It enables us to notify the public of those individuals being released if we feel they pose a significant risk of harm, and we continue to flag those individuals on the national police computer system.

This is a concern for us. In fact, at the federal/provincial ministers' meeting in December in Montreal the issue of creating a national pedophile registry was discussed, and it is being examined. But the bottom line is that the individual had served his sentence, and therefore at law he was to be released.

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Justice: do we require or do we offer treatment to people like this gentleman when they're in our jails?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, we do provide treatment programs in our correctional centres. Nevertheless, offenders are entitled to refuse treatment. In the case of offenders who refuse treatment, they are ineligible for early release and serve every day of their sentence, as happened in this situation. I am advised in this case that the offender did take some treatment, albeit not as much as we probably would have hoped, and that's again why when he was released, we made those concerns known to the police pursuant to the serious and violent crime strategy, and that's why his release was made known to the public.

MRS. O'NEILL: My final question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Justice again: what good does it do to notify the public after the person is let out? Is there a program?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that we feel that because of the offence committed by this individual it was classified as a serious and violent offence. We feel that the public needs to know about this release after the individual has served his sentence so members of the public can take precautionary measures. That's the bottom line as to why we push for this information getting out into the public.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has now left us. I might just note that today we had 13 sets of questions, which is the largest number that we've had in any question period since we began.

Prior to calling Orders of the Day, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly nine university students from Seoul, Korea, who are in Canada for six weeks studying English at the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. They are accompanied today by their instructor, Walter Zieber, and I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

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

Bill 4
Libraries Amendment Act, 1998

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to debate Bill 4, the Alberta Libraries Amendment Act, 1998. The purpose of the Bill is to update the Libraries Act. This legislation sets out the governing infrastructure that enables the municipal and provincial governments to work together to deliver quality and equitable public library service to all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, public libraries are essential to our future. They further lifelong learning, and they encourage creativity. They support strong, healthy communities, and they help Albertans compete in the global economy. The Libraries Act recognizes the unique role of the public libraries as the key point of access to information for all Albertans.

The amendments to the act are proposed to ensure that the act will meet the future needs of Albertans. Since 1983 there have been tremendous advancements in technology, communication, and availability of resources. Libraries have changed from lenders of books to learning resource centres with access to information in a variety of mediums from around the world.

The first Libraries Act was passed in 1905, which was within two years of the establishment of the province, and it was last amended in 1983. These proposed amendments are based on public input. They have been developed from the results of a public consultation process carried out by the Public Library Review Committee in 1995.

The proposed amendments to the act include deleting sections that are no longer relevant, such as the section on the library board, which has not operated for the last six years; allowing more flexibility and authority for municipalities in the term of appointment to municipal library boards; reducing the number of meetings required by library boards; establishing library federations in the metropolitan areas of Edmonton and Calgary so libraries in these areas can work together to provide co-operative services; identifying services that fall under basic library service that all Albertans are entitled to and that fees cannot be levied for. These include access to library facilities, use of library resources in the library, borrowing library materials per se, acquiring library materials through interlibrary loan, consultation by library staff, and basic information services. The amendments will allow cost recovery for public libraries for other services. For example, fees may be levied for photocopying.

In response to input from municipalities and public library

boards, the act will retain the structure of the municipal library boards. It will also provide for the continuation of community library boards in areas where there is no municipal government. This includes improvement districts, Métis settlements, and First Nations reserves.

The act will also retain the structure of the library system boards as municipally based boards. These boards provide broad-based, regional services to provide equitable library service to a wide range of communities with varying populations at lower costs.

In addition to serving public libraries and member municipalities, the amendments will allow library system boards to provide service to school libraries.

Mr. Speaker, this act, with the proposed amendment, lays the foundation for future public library service in Alberta. Alberta's library community has a vision for the year 2005, which was jointly presented at the Alberta Growth Summit by the Alberta Library Trustees Association and the Library Association of Alberta. They stated that they see a modern telecommunications network connecting all libraries to all sectors of Alberta's growth strategy – a comprehensive, integrated library system supporting individuals, communities, and economic growth – well-trained staff to support the wide range of customer needs, and enhanced focus on partnership building.

Updating the Libraries Act is the first step towards helping them realize this vision. I urge every member in this Assembly to support this bill. It looks to the future, it provides for the future, and it is based in the future.

Thank you.

2:40

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 4, the Libraries Amendment Act, in second reading. I do support this bill. I think its time has come. As the hon. member mentioned, the last time we really looked at library services and what is covered under the act was in 1983. I am very pleased to note at the same time that we have had a Libraries Act in Alberta since 1907 and note also that it was a Liberal government that introduced it at that time. So it's been a long and proud history of libraries in Alberta.

I have very strong memories of attending the local library, which was the Strathcona library, in my youth, and reading and libraries and access to them have been an important part of my life and that of my family. I'm sure many other people in Alberta share the desire to continue and strengthen our library services.

I think there are some very useful things that are covered in this bill. Certainly deleting sections which no longer apply is a useful housekeeping service which should be done. I'm very interested in the idea of library federations in the metropolitan areas of Edmonton and Calgary. I think this is a step leading us into the future, especially when we consider the electronic highway, high-technology information systems of the future.

I have a small concern – and I'll come back to it later – about the services for which fees may be charged. I am very pleased to see that the Métis settlements have been included and are being worked with in partnership through this act. As well, there are a number of other services that are being continued to the school libraries and the continuation of the community library boards in the regions where there is no municipal government. That's interesting to note, because there are 245 library boards and 10 community library boards. So there is still a useful function there.

Two concerns that I would like to raise specifically. Métis settlements have been included, and I think I heard the hon. member also say that First Nations would be included in this, but I don't see that in the bill. I recognize that we're crossing jurisdictional boundaries here, but I think it's important that we find a way to do this, to work with this. I believe that there are some examples existing for us where other provinces have been able to include First Nation reservations in their system, and I hope that the hon. member can maybe work with that once we're in Committee of the Whole.

There's also a concern, that I hope is dealt with during Committee of the Whole, about the services that can be charged for. I certainly understand the need in this day and age for a user-pay system for things like photocopies, and the bill is outlining where it's acceptable to have charges for certain things. To be honest, I'm personally still a little uneasy about charging for library cards. I think sometimes that's a question of access, but I know that most boards will find a way to work with someone if they're truly interested. I'm a little concerned that the legislation is not giving a parameter. There is a possibility that in the future, under the minister's discretion, additional items could be added to the list of what's charged for. I think it's really critical that we guard against there ever being a perceived lack of access to library services: access to the library staff, to reference material, to resource material, to librarians being able to help people out with their questions. So I'm hoping that there's a way we can craft that into the legislation.

I have gone through and reviewed the Public Library Review document. I note that actually some of my concerns were raised in there as well, and I think a number of these have been covered in the bill. I'm also wondering if there's any commitment to following some of the recommendations about staff requirements based on the population in a municipality. I think that would be helpful. I know that right now a number of the library groups that I spoke to are particularly concerned about the funding. I don't want to stray too far off the intent of the bill, but I have to raise this point because it was made to me so often. I'm hoping that in the budget we will hear on Thursday there will be a move to the current population base for the population-based funding. I think that's really important.

We don't ever want to be in a position where we're strangling our smaller libraries or any of the library systems that we've had, because essentially this is the most accessible source of entertainment, enlightenment, education, and access to other worlds for people. I think it's still the most accessible to anyone, and we need to work hard to maintain that accessibility to it and to make sure that it's properly funded. I realize that to many people libraries are not a particularly sexy item in the budget, but I think it's a critical part of who we are as Albertans and how we are able to get access to information.

I think those are the points that I wanted to raise while I speak to the bill in second reading. I do applaud this bill being brought forward. We needed it, certainly to correct some of the housekeeping items and to pave the way for things like the federation in the Edmonton and Calgary areas. I look forward to speaking further on the bill in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 4, which is the Libraries Amendment Act, as brought forward by the hon. Member for St. Albert. I listened to her opening comments, and then I was unfortunately

called away on a couple of minutes of business outside the House, so I didn't get to hear the full extent of what her explanation was in terms of the bill and the need for it and so on. However, I do have some comments that I have researched on my own.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, this is the time for debate, at second reading. We'll have opportunity at committee, should it reach there, to have this exchange of questions. Today it's debate time.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Exactly why I'm standing in my place, to debate.

I was struck immediately, however, by the purpose behind this so-called update for the Libraries Act, which on the surface looks quite good to me, and I was struck by the fact that there are some provisions within the bill that talk about ensuring a smoother transition and/or phasing out of some of the boards, which, as I understand it, have not met for quite some time. I was looking in the bill to see a greater description, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the new term "federation board." Then I found some definitions a little later that talk about the requirements, as it were, of what would take place if municipal boards were in fact amalgamated and how that would streamline operations for the libraries.

2:50

Like the hon. member who proposed the bill, I too place a great deal of importance on libraries. They're a resource in our schools and in our communities that oftentimes aren't maximized enough by individuals. However, having recently been to the Edmonton public library again, on this occasion with my daughter to do some class research with her, I was struck to learn that the Edmonton public library, quoting statistics from the '95-96 year, had close to 4 million visits that were made to the libraries in Edmonton in 14 different locations. I just couldn't believe that number. I was overwhelmed. I mean, of course I believe it, but it just sounds overwhelming that there would be that many people there.

I inquired a little further to talk about what it was that those visits were all about, and I was further impressed and amazed to learn that 7.6 million items were borrowed by the Edmonton public library visitors alone and that something like 12,000 schoolchildren had discovered their hidden treasures in the library, as their report stated. During that time there was something in the order of over 4 million minutes accumulated during a nine-week program alone, and I thought to myself: isn't this wonderful that our libraries in Edmonton are receiving that kind of care and attention and usage? So we must never underemphasize the great importance that these libraries play, particularly for our young people.

Mr. Speaker, every time I go to one of our schools for a presentation of photos or to do a little question and answer, I always make it a point to go to the library and speak, if I can, with the librarian. I'm struck by the fact that many of our meetings do in fact occur in those libraries, and I want to again emphasize how important it is that we support things that make the libraries more effective, more accessible, as the hon. member referred to in her covering comments.

I see this particular bill as ushering in some housekeeping, Mr. Speaker. There are a lot of substitutions and deletions and tidying up, as it were, of legal jargon, deletions of irrelevancy, some descriptions about appointments and numbers of meetings, that kind of thing. I think I can support all of that.

The other thing, when we get into the actual debate during the

committee stage, that I would like the member proposing the bill to comment on is with respect to specialized municipalities. I looked for some further substantiation of that, hon. member, and I did not see anywhere where that was clarified. Perhaps I missed it in skimming through the bill. However, that's referred to on page 1, hon. member, section 2(d). So if there could be a little bit of an explanation to that, I'd be very grateful for it.

Similarly, while I on first glance, Mr. Speaker, am favourably disposed to the bill, I would appreciate the hon. member just presenting ever so briefly, if she would at some stage during the debate, an explanation of the type of research or background information that she may have compiled in leading up to this bill and, in particular, what kind of feedback she received from the stakeholders who are going to have to live with this bill on a day-to-day basis, those being some of our library systems and networks. I recall that when we first established the nine geographic areas for libraries back in 1984, quite a bit of thought went into that process, and I think this bill has the ability to impact that point. So I'd like some explanation, as I say, very brief as it might be, from the hon. member clarifying that.

I'm also impressed that there was reference made to the new technologies. Mr. Speaker, we're moving almost at light-year speed through the communications networking, and libraries are going to either be the largest beneficiaries of that, or they're going to be stymied and stigmatized for the rest of their careers because things are moving at such a pace we can't even keep up. I wonder if there's some capability within this bill to address that matter. I note, for example, that there were 5.5 million electronic searches done on terminals in the Edmonton library system alone, and that gives you some indication of how critical that particular area of new technologies is.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take up more of the Assembly's time right now. I've raised some of the issues. There are more that I would like addressed later, but they're more of a detailed nature. I should add that they're of a nonthreatening nature, just information seeking, and I will have that opportunity during the Committee of the Whole stage. So I look forward to that stage of debate.

With those brief comments, Mr. Speaker, I would take my seat and thank you for your attention.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to say that some of the questions that have been raised I will respond to further. But I would like to say, because we have in the gallery today the chairperson and the members of the Public Library Review Committee, in answer to the last comment that was made, there was considerable input given to the proposals that we are making here, considerable input from those who are involved at the trustee level, at the library front-end level, and all of the others. I just want you to know that, and then I would at this point call the question.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

**Bill 5
Canadian Airlines Corporation
Amendment Act, 1998**

[Adjourned debate February 4: Mr. Paszkowski]

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

MS GRAHAM: I move that debate be closed and reiterate my motion that Bill 5 be read a second time.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Bill 6

Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move second reading of Bill 6, being the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act.

The current act, the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Control Act, deals with public safety in the handling and transportation of dangerous goods by road. The primary purpose of the new act is to bring the legislation in line with federal legislation which was amended in 1992. A draft act was prepared in 1994 and was used for stakeholder consultation. Based on input from the industry and other stakeholders, we have revised the draft into this bill.

Mr. Speaker, we've done our homework, and it's now time to bring our legislation in line with the federal act. There are three important reasons why this needs to be done. The first reason is that we need to have uniform legislation so Alberta shippers and carriers of energy and chemical products can compete effectively in national and international markets.

The second reason is to ensure that we continue to administer federal and provincial legislation in our province. Alberta has signed an agreement with the federal government to allow us to administer the federal legislation in Alberta along with our provincial legislation. If you want to be responsive to the issues raised by our shippers and carriers, our provincial legislation must be consistent with federal legislation.

3:00

The third reason is that we need to benefit from the important changes that will make the transportation and handling of dangerous goods safer and more effective in Alberta.

There are seven ways in which the new act accomplishes these goals. The penalty section is the first one, and it provides for higher fines for continuing offences. It also provides for creative sentencing, allowing judges the flexibility to order companies to conduct research projects on ways to enhance safety or to restore damage to the environment.

Number two. Imminent accidental releases, or accidents which have not yet happened but seem likely, would now have to be reported to allow safety workers and officials to take preventive action.

Number three. Prima facie evidence is accepted. This means that inspectors could accept the label on the container as proof of its contents rather than exposing themselves to the dangerous goods.

Number four. The transport of dangerous goods on provincial rail lines is covered by the proposed act.

Number five. Exemption permits are dropped from the proposed legislation, thereby ensuring that some level of safety be adopted even in the most urgent situations. A review of local dangerous goods routes is to be reviewed every five years.

Number six. To protect fundamental freedoms, inspectors will now need a warrant before they search a dwelling place.

The remaining section deals with emergency response assistance plans that detail the industry's capability to assist our local

emergency response forces when we have an accident involving extremely hazardous substances. Currently the federal government inspects these plans, often with little flexibility and under very short time lines. The proposal is to bring these plans under provincial jurisdiction, where we have a proven track record of working with business in a flexible, supportive, and creative way to respond to the unique needs of the industry.

Mr. Speaker, these are the proposed changes to the legislation. The majority of the provisions from the current statute remain unchanged because they work. However, the changes that I've outlined here today are necessary to bring the legislation in line with the federal legislation and to improve the safety of the dangerous goods transportation and handling in Alberta. That concludes the major areas of changes that Bill 6, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act, would address.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few comments this afternoon on Bill 6, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act. The transportation of dangerous goods in this province is not something we think about every day, but as the industry in this province expands, this bill is more important than many of the people in the public think. Members of the trucking industry would know full well just how important sound government regulations are concerning the transportation of dangerous goods.

In my constituency of Edmonton Gold-Bar there is talk of having a dangerous goods route down the centre of it. We heard earlier from members across the way of their concern about downloading of inspections. There is cargo transportation, pressure vessels in this province; 10 percent of them are uninspected, Mr. Speaker, and those 10 percent transport dangerous goods. We must have sound inspection. We must have sound auditing of these vessels that are used for the transportation of dangerous goods. Public safety is paramount in this. If this bill, as I said before, will prevent any loss of property, loss of life, or loss of good health, then it is a sound piece of legislation, and I will be proud to support it. However, I do have a few questions.

I had direct experience with the provincial environment department, with the Department of Labour, with the federal government and their regulations regarding the transportation of dangerous goods during the hydrochloric acid spill in Red Deer last September. Maybe this piece of legislation is to make sure that that occurrence doesn't happen again, because one outfit did not know what the other was doing there. The report that was presented to me graciously by the Department of Labour certainly outlined the inadequacies in that. There were rules and regulations regarding hydrochloric acid from the federal Department of the Environment, and obviously people had not read them. Not only does the hydrochloric acid leave that depot; it goes all over to the oil fields, and it's in the highest concentration that's commercially available.

There are numbered placards on trucks, and the general public just sees 839 on the back of a truck for instance, Mr. Speaker. They don't know whether it's hydrochloric acid or whether it's some other corrosive substance, and this is one thing that should be changed. The public has a right to know. With this PCB spill that happened on the way to Swan Hills last week, there were a couple of litres of PCBs over a period of road that leaked out. The motoring public, for instance in Whitecourt, that pull into a

truck stop behind this semi that's transporting this stuff have no idea that it's PCBs. They just see a number on there. Perhaps we should look at changing this number system, as I said before, so that the motoring public can travel safely.

There are higher penalties. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills talked about that. That is something I agree with. If people are breaking the law, penalize them. The reports for accidents, this should be very, very strong. It should happen immediately. There shouldn't be a four-day wait, like there has been in some circumstances in the past. The uniform legislation between the federal government and this province needs to be worked out so that all the goods that we use in our industrial processes can be transferred from one end of the province – north, south, east, west – without any sort of public inconvenience. If this bill is to do this, I will certainly support it, and I will look forward to Committee of the Whole. There are a few questions there that I have for the hon. member.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to get a couple of comments on the record at second reading of Bill 6, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act. This legislation may prove to be some of the most important legislation that we'll deal with.

I can recall a time in my constituency, about two and a half years ago, when there was an emergency declared and a number of officials – fire, police, paramedics – had to be called out along Stony Plain Road in Edmonton because a pickup truck had been found with a number of explosive devices in the box and the tailgate was missing from the pickup truck. As the pickup was rounding a corner, one of the boxes of explosives had fallen out of the back of the pickup truck, and there was a little trail of these explosive devices down the road. The pickup truck ended up being parked outside one of the local establishments – I guess the driver had gone inside to have a cold one on a hot day – and somebody came by and helped themselves to another box of these explosive devices, and the authorities were eventually called.

This created considerable concern about the handling and the transportation, and one of things that I found is that there wasn't a clear line of responsibility in terms of what had happened and who was to be held accountable and against what legislation or regulation. It had to do with the kind of carrier that was involved, and it had to do with the purposes for which the explosive material was going to be used and how it was being conveyed. I thought: what a mess; there's got to be a more straightforward way to deal with this kind of a problem and this kind of potential catastrophe and that some good preventative legislation was needed on the part of the province. So I'm glad to see that the member from Olds? Didsbury? The member who introduced the legislation, I'm proud that he did that, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

MR. SMITH: It's not far from Beiseker, about 40 miles from Beiseker.

MR. SAPERS: I'm told that it's not far from Beiseker, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to prove to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that I could say it.

Mr. Speaker, with the legislation that has been presented though, I'll be hoping that when we get to committee – and I'm sure that this bill is going to come forward to committee fairly

rapidly – the member will take a minute or two to address a couple of concerns. Then once we have some comment, we can determine whether or not we need some amendment. I have some concerns in the legislation with the sections that deal with exemptions, and I notice that there are two primary reasons why exemptions may be issued. It's under section 5. I don't want to spend a lot of time at second reading doing detail of a section-by-section review, but I will have some questions for the member about exemptions, particularly 5(1)(a).

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I notice that there is an extensive list under section 31 about regulations. In fact, any of the real substance of the bill can be found in reference to the regulations section. Of course, the Liberal opposition caucus has a tradition in this House of asking the government to convene the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations and to make sure that regulations are dealt with in the light of day.

I anticipate clearly that there would be an amendment coming forward that may call for any regulations developed under this act to be dealt with in public by convening that committee for the specific purpose of dealing with regulations. I think that's only fair and reasonable, and I hope we'll have the sponsor's agreement with that, because if you're really trying to encourage the free movement of goods and the safe movement of goods and you want those people who are involved in the transportation of dangerous goods as well as those people whose communities might be trailled through by those goods, it seems to me that everybody should know fully what the expectations are. Everybody should be as completely and as totally aware as we can possibly see to it about the circumstances and the consequences should they run afoul of the prescribed law and regulation.

I would hope that the regulations section would either be reduced in scope and many of those areas actually put into the body of the legislation itself or that if it's seen that all of these things must be left to regulation, it not be done just by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, that we don't just sort of abdicate the detail work on such a good bill to Executive Council, that we have a chance to either debate them, as I said, by moving them into the body of the bill or at least ensuring that the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations is convened so that there can be a good healthy discussion, a debate, and the best ideas coming forward to ensure that we have the best law for the safe transportation of dangerous goods.

Mr. Speaker, the last area of general concern that I have is the powers of an inspector. This bill contemplates that an inspector would have some considerable powers of search, seizure, entering property, and I would like to hear some more discussion from the sponsor of the bill about how the inspectors' powers are going to be overseen, what will be, I guess, the controls that may be placed on these expanded duties. We often hear questions about, you know: who police the police? So who's going to be looking over the shoulders of an inspector in regard to this bill with these new expanded powers? And are we certain that there will be a balance struck between the necessary powers of an inspector to ensure the application of this act and the orderly transportation and handling of goods without undue interference or encumbrance because of regulation and control and perhaps even overzealous enforcement? That balance has to be there, and if you just read the act as it's drafted, it raises some questions in my mind.

So those are three areas of concern that I have on what I believe to be an act that is very much in the public interest and definitely moves us in the direction that we all want to go.

Thank you.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a few brief comments to pass on with respect to Bill 6, that being the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act, as brought forward by the hon. member from across the way. I, too, would like to reiterate that I know him as the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, as does my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora.

In looking at the bill and listening carefully to what he says, I too wish to underscore the importance of a bill such as this, which has as its fundamental root the concern for the safety of the people of this province as well as all other living matter, including our plants and animals, the wildlife, and in a general sense concern about the environment. So I look at this bill as being something that has the potential at least to be very effective in ensuring that type of safety and compliance with safety regulations.

As I understood from reading through the bill, there is the aspect of course of bringing our current legislation through a bill like this up to par, shall we say, with the federal legislation that's already in place. I share some concerns that were enunciated earlier, Mr. Speaker, with regard to the recent spills we heard about in the news en route to the Bovar plant in Swan Hills.

I recall the debate several years ago when we were first talking about whether or not Alberta should be the place to house and support such a waste treatment facility. I'm sure that even the Speaker was involved in those discussions or in listening to comments that were made. At the time I think we went ahead with a deal that looked like it was important for the province to do. Now, on reflection, we've seen some pros and some cons to it, and the debate will go on. But it always was a concern to me. I've heard from my constituents now that they may not be all that pleased with the waste treatment plant that we have in Swan Hills. To be fair, I think they're more concerned with the potential for leakage and contamination of the atmosphere and land that surrounds that area than they are with the actual transporting to and from.

I note, too, that there were concerns a few years ago with regard to the Alberta research centre, when there were some questions raised in this very House about dangerous materials possibly being swept out the back doors. I think the hon. Member for Sherwood Park of the day in fact raised that as an issue, and we were very concerned about the safety controls that were there. Of course, that was an in-house matter, but I think it impacts on the transportation aspect as well, because we can never be too careful when we talk about the packaging of these materials or the containment, the transferral of these materials and ultimately their disposal. We have to give Albertans a great sense of comfort, Mr. Speaker, that legislation like this in fact does address all of those points with a view to protecting them and the precious environment that we have.

I looked at this bill also from the standpoint, Mr. Speaker, of having grown up in a small town called Sangudo, which I know you're very familiar with. As you know and the hon. member from Lac Ste. Anne knows, highway 43 is one of the busiest highways in this province. It always has been since it was a gravel road that we traveled up until it became paved and ultimately became four lanes. A good chunk of that road is used sometimes by certain transport vehicles to get to a connector road that would take them on up to Swan Hills one way or the other.

3:20

Having grown up in Sangudo, as I say, right next to highway

43, I saw many accidents there. Fortunately for me I was never involved in them, but I just really shudder to think what would happen if we were to have some kind of a major accident, such as some of the ones we used to have, where a dangerous goods vehicle was involved. Throughout our constituencies, Mr. Speaker, we all have or we have near us dangerous goods routes that are impacted by this legislation, and I think we need to underscore our concern about legislation that is related thereto.

The point about the dangerous goods themselves I was happy to see referred to in section 1 on page 2 of the bill, where a definition is referred to. It says that

"dangerous goods" means a product, substance or organism included by its nature or by the regulations in any of the classes listed in the Schedule.

So I looked for the schedule, and I'm not sure where it is. Perhaps it's at the back here and talks about explosives and gases and flammables and so on.

As I looked at those, I wondered how exhaustive this list is, given that we're in the age of information and technology and it's moving so quickly that more and more dangerous goods keep coming. I wouldn't say that the definitions are restrictive, Mr. Speaker; I just wonder if there's a provision within the schedule for the hon. member to just have something along the lines of: or whatever it is that the minister in conjunction with the federal counterpart may deem to be a dangerous good in the future. This tends to lay out fairly clearly what they are at the moment, hon. member. But as a new dangerous good may get identified, you may want the flexibility of having a local decision made to define one, and/or you're going to have to keep coming back to amend the bill, at least the way I read that it's described on pages 16 and 17.

With respect to the permits that govern dangerous goods, Mr. Speaker, I note here, too, that there's a fairly extensive description of what it is that the permits must look like and what authorities the permits allow. At the same time, I also see that there's a description of why and under what circumstances perhaps a minister may revoke a permit, and I take it by definition that the minister in this case means not only a member of Executive Council but perhaps a delegated person at the local level as well, although the act doesn't say that.

There's sometimes the need for expediency, and if you can't contact the minister or, as defined here, "the member of the Executive Council determined under section 16(1) of the Government Organization Act," then who is it that you would go to to immediately access the kind of process that you need to in fact begin the removal of a permit? Maybe the hon. member will comment on that in some detail a little bit later. Safety levels, of course, is what's at great concern, and the minute some accident happens with regard to a dangerous good, I know the hon. member would want swift and immediate action. So a bill like this should, in my view, make a provision to ensure that swift action can be easily taken without the normal encumbrances of red tape.

Secondly, with regard to inspections, I was searching to see how it is that the certification process really works, and as part of that certification I think it goes without saying that there would be training, seminars, specialized sessions, et cetera. I'm taking that as a given, and I don't want to dwell on that. I would like to point out that the people doing the inspections, or what they term here "inspectors," have an incredible amount of responsibility and a tremendous amount of power vested in them. Perhaps it's the inspectors who would be given that right of removal of a permit that I alluded to earlier; I'm not sure. I would like some clarifica-

tion on the inspectors and the type of training that they may or may not be required to undergo as a result of this bill specifically.

Now, I realize, Mr. Speaker, that we already have some of this in process, and I'm not looking for a long-winded answer. I'm simply asking on behalf of, I think, all Albertans what that certification and training program might look like, because we are delegating them rather enormous responsibilities and at the same time privileges and powers under this bill. You could see these inspectors being not unlike an immigration official, who at that moment, at his or her discretion, has the power to let the person into or not let the person into this country. Similarly I would say the analogy applies to inspectors here.

My final couple of points are with respect to enforcement, monitoring, and penalties as described on page 13 of the bill. Specifically, I think there's a fine here of \$50,000 for a first offence or something along that line. I'm just interested to know what it is that other provinces, other jurisdictions have as their penalties and how closely we parallel them, because a lot of the dangerous goods that come to, let's say, the Bovar site, as an example, come not only from within the province of Alberta, but they come to us from elsewhere. I'm just wondering how we stack up in our fines and penalties and how serious a deterrent that can be.

My last point, Mr. Speaker, is with regard to the focus on prevention of possible spillage and abuses, as inadvertent as they might be, of these materials. We see a tremendous increase in the number, the amount, and the type of dangerous goods, for example, that are being produced through our hospital or medicare system. There's a tremendous need to be very vigilant with those materials. How are we focusing on the prevention aspect? Is that somewhere referred to, or is it possible to refer to it here? Is it an on-site training that in this case each hospital might be responsible for?

Transportation of dangerous goods isn't necessarily just restricted to truck, car, or trailer transportation. It could be on a more localized basis. We dispose of these hazardous goods, for example paints. There's an annual roundup in the city, which I'm sure you're familiar with, Mr. Speaker. There's the transportation of dangerous goods or potentially dangerous goods by us the citizens. While this act doesn't speak to me as a citizen of Alberta, it speaks to a broader issue. I think there's a concern to focus on the prevention, and the education side of it may be something that you'd like to comment on as well, hon. member, educating children to identify, to recognize, and to treat ever so carefully these dangerous goods.

There is also a raft of dangerous goods, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, being presented through the chemical and biochemical industries as well as through the oil and energy sectors. While I think most of that is in good hands with good, responsible deliveries, again, there needs to be a focus on prevention. New employees, new administrators, new managers are coming onstream all the time, and we have a tremendous responsibility to ensure their safety and protection. I think the focus on that is prevention and training.

So, hon. member, I will take my seat. Thank you for listening to those concerns, and thank you, Mr. Speaker, for listening to them. I look forward to more debate on this, but on first glance I would say that it seems to be a bill that does move the cause of safety forward in a positive way with respect to the transferral of dangerous goods. I'll probably be able to support most of this. I would look forward to some possible amendments, as may be necessary.

Thank you.

3:30

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 6 as well. Like several other members who have spoken to this point on the bill, on reading of the bill, I'm prepared to support the spirit and intention of the bill.

Certainly Alberta's economy has within it a very large petrochemical sector, of course. The pharmaceutical sector is also developing. We have dangerous goods waste disposal facilities located in this province, and the biotechnology developments might also put some more and new kinds of goods and chemicals and substances on the list of what we call dangerous substances and whatnot.

I looked at section 34 on page 16, which mentions and includes nine classes of dangerous substances and goods. I wonder if the 3,500 different chemicals and about 400 explosives that are listed by the United Nations in this category are covered by these nine classes and whether or not both this bill and the government in general are in agreement with what's on that UN list of dangerous goods and explosives.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I just do not know whether or not the classes of goods included on the last page of this bill . . .

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] Were you finished, sir?

DR. PANNU: May I continue?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, presumably you've misunderstood. When the changing of the guard here occurs, we're both going to be standing up, but that's why we're facing this direction, so that we don't interfere with your speech. So we apologize and would ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to continue.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So for the nine classes of goods and chemicals that are mentioned on the last two pages of the draft of the bill, I just wonder if they're exhaustive enough to include the chemicals and explosives included in the UN list. I perhaps just would like the member to say something on this later on.

We also know, of course, that the volume of dangerous goods and chemicals and explosives that move across this vast province every year is huge. You know, it's about 15 million tonnes of chemicals and explosives that are transported within this province every year. This includes of course PCBs that go to Swan Hills. This includes all kinds of road spills and chemicals carried on trains and from train accidents, leading to spillage from such accidents.

Mr. Speaker, one feature of the bill that I think I'd like the member to perhaps say something more on is on page 4, section

5(1) of the bill. It deals with the exemptions by permit. It certainly puts a great deal of discretion in the hands of the minister, and I have some concerns about that, given the fact that this government's general treatment of violations by different players in the economy is rather lenient. I wonder if this discretion is not too much power put in the hands of the minister by this bill. I wonder if the member will make some comments to that effect.

Section 6: inspectors, designation and so on. Clearly inspectors will be playing a very, very critical role in the process of both doing the inspections and monitoring the transportation and disposal of these materials across this province. I would hope that there'll be opportunity to add something to this bill that will certainly require both employers and government to ensure that there is systematic training that's available to those who'd be designated as inspectors to carry out the intent that's embodied in this bill. At the moment I don't see such an obligation laid out; that is, an obligation to train and provide education required by such a role as will be played by the inspectors.

I'm pleased that section 8 carefully exempts dwelling places from inspection by inspectors without proper notice, without authorized warrant and whatnot. I think it is an important feature of this bill. I certainly appreciate that the member has paid due attention to this important civil rights issue dealing with the freedom and the privacy that we enjoy in our dwellings.

One or two other points. Section 23, on page 11, suggests that "proceedings under this Act may not be instituted later than 2 years after the day the offence is alleged to have been committed." I just want to hear some rationale for limiting to two years. I think that limiting to two years might entail certain risks with respect to public health and safety. It may also reduce the deterrent value of this bill, if it passes into an act, if the limit of two years is retained as it is in the present. I'd certainly hope that the member will address this issue and give the House some rationale as to why he's limiting it to two years.

I will have perhaps a few more things to say, Mr. Speaker, at the next stage of the debate on the bill. At this point I close with those remarks. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you kindly, sir. I rise to speak to this bill, a very important bill in that it sets out and catches up with a lot of legislation and regulation that's changing across Canada as we speak, particularly because of the changes in the real world, the chemical world and the physical world. These things change all the time and of course present a great deal of potential danger to the public.

It strikes me and at least one of my colleagues on this side of the House that this bill lacks one thing, a very important bit: a bit of preamble in the front end of the legislation to basically explain the bill in layman's terms, to outline the need for the bill and the extent of the bill so that the general public are aware of where to find certain pieces of legislation and how they relate to their lives. This would be quite handy, and I suggest to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, who brought this bill forward, that he speak to the drafters of the bill and see if a paragraph or two might be inserted, probably before the definitions, to give that little bit of enlightenment to the public.

Second of all, I'd like to congratulate all of those from the industry and the government that worked on this piece of legisla-

tion and the regulation that will follow it for their efforts to bring public safety to the fore in this province.

Now, one of my concerns in this bill overall is this government's tendency to absolutely believe that the least government possible the better. This particular bill is absolutely necessary. If you err on the side of least government, then you do a disservice to the public in this particular case, I believe, because this piece of legislation can never be fully up to date. The day that this bill receives Royal Assent, it'll be outdated, and it cannot help but be because of the advancements in technology that we deal with every day in our lives.

I would think that the government would like to have somewhere in the regulations portion an ongoing review so as to not have to revisit the legislation over and over and over again year after year after year to include dangerous chemicals as they are discovered to become dangerous. I might add that in my relatively short technical lifetime, PCBs went from something that was benign and stored in virtually every warehouse and virtually every electrical distribution centre throughout Small Town, Alberta, as well as in the cities – they were just stored in the corner, and nobody thought much of it – to what we had approximately five years ago, when it was discovered how dangerous these chemicals can actually be and how their chemical half-life is so very, very long as to outlive the combined lifetimes of all of the people in this room. That being the case, these chemicals have to be stored and transported in such a manner that we account for every little bit of the material.

3:40

Now, that change has occurred over the span of 10 years, to a crescendo five years ago and now to a manageable level. I suppose my question is: how many of those chemicals that we believe to be benign out there at present are in fact and can be classed and should be classed as really quite dangerous? I don't know, and I have a technical background and can't possibly declare that all of those I know to be dangerous are included in this legislation, because it is quite extensive. But we do have to know that these areas are being covered. If one is to err on any side of this matter, then err on the side of safety and be inclusive as opposed to exclusive. That would mean a very flexible or amendable regime of regulations, which we cannot find in this legislation at all. The variance must be done in legislation, it appears, and there doesn't seem to be any manner, save and except the miscellaneous provisions of the very last class, that by order in council can be modified from time to time.

Now, had the intent of the legislation been to have – I can't recall the full name of the committee, but it relates to regulations, a standing committee of this House. Had that committee been envisaged as having some power in this legislation to review these things, then they could conduct ongoing hearings periodically – once every six months or a year would be adequate – in order to have the industry that produces these chemicals aid in identification of these chemicals, to have the medical service of the society say that, yes, here is something that we've noted to be potentially dangerous and therefore should be reviewed, for a committee to be able to review these things and set the standards immediately so as to prevent the long delay it takes to go through the current process and go through the gathering up of these chemicals to set them aside and be able to deal with them by order in council, perhaps as many as three or four years late.

Now, the other area of this bill that particularly concerns me – and perhaps the member can comment when we get a little further into the bill. I'd like him to comment on how standard these

regulations are across Canada. Recognizing that more and more we're becoming a society of specialists and that chemicals are produced in one area and consumed in another, if those regulations are inconsistent across Canada, then what happens is that those chemicals go immediately south across the border, are transported across the United States and imported into Canada, sometimes even repackaged, where the regulation allows for the transportation of those goods in a different manner. I'd like some comment on that and comment on the progress of the industry committee that was struck to review and put forward the regulations as they currently stand in this legislation, how they feel about the progress being made to deal with regulations across the length and breadth of this nation.

Another provision that leaves me a little cold is the great deal of provisions for enforcement and how an inspector is identified and all that surrounds the enforcement of this act. Well, it begs a question. This government has cut back the department so great an extent that there are painfully few of those that are in the enforcement field and even less that have the wherewithal and the knowledge of a fairly advanced understanding of not only the production of chemicals but the identification of chemicals and other hazardous goods and wastes and know how in fact they are transported, what the volumes and toxicity are, if the particular chemical is rated in toxicity, or the amount of each chemical that is considered and the relative danger it permits.

That takes a great deal of training, and this government seems to have downsized to the extent that – my guess, although I have no knowledge of this particularly – the number of people that are in this area are very, very few and far between. We have this vast province and have truck drivers and shippers and receivers that can't possibly have this kind of knowledge, and we're shipping these about with a wonderful piece of legislation that is absolutely, completely unenforceable because of lack of knowledge and lack of staff. I should like to hear some discussion about that in committee, because it's hardly worth passing a useless piece of legislation of some 16 or 18 pages of fluff if they absolutely mean absolutely nothing out there in the real world.

Now, there are some seven sections that deal with the certification of inspection and a number of areas such as that, and I believe that they seem to be fairly thorough but say nothing of the actual training, the specific training of these persons. I would like to see something like that contained, because it appears that less than a high school graduate could be able to qualify with the lack of provisions that are here in the act. Not to say that that person could not be trained through some training program, but this says absolutely nothing about that.

Then to compound that, one section says that anything that a person does, so long as it's not motivated by bad faith – it doesn't say anything about any other kind of motivation: overzealous or trying to prove something to the boss. It specifically does not say: for lack of education or lack of understanding. I can see a great deal of danger here in the imposition of this act by those that are less trained than they should be, and that's an act of commission.

Now, the one that worries me even more is the one of omission, because surely the person that wants to keep their job – that is, being an inspector as identified in the act – would certainly not want to err over and over and over again and have their errors pointed out to them: errors of fact, errors of concentration of chemicals being so low that dilutions are virtually harmless to the environment or persons and he or she has decided that this shipment must actually stop where it stands. Now, two or three

of those errors and you know what would happen to the person. If the knowledge is not there to understand what this person is doing, you know what they'll do. It'll be an error of omission. They'll be saying: oh well, that's fine.

3:50

Now, what happens in the case where some very dangerous goods are moving into and across this province, through our small communities and our large ones, when this is very, very dangerous and the inspector stops and reviews this but has no knowledge of this brand spanking new chemical or it's a brand name or a trade name of a chemical and the concentration is not identified as it should be? Now, does that person that is not trained properly make a stand there and say, "No, this shipment is not going anywhere; this shipment has to stop here until I understand exactly what is contained in that", and admit that the inspector does not know? I don't think so. That person without the proper knowledge would just pass that product along, because there's nobody that knows or is able to see that product more than he. So the error of omission is the one that concerns me. That's a matter of enforcement, and there's nothing in the bill that reviews that.

There's a great deal that's said about prosecution and penalties in the act, too, that concerns me. I quite frankly cannot ever recall under this act any proper prosecutions. I remember there was one in the city of Edmonton where there were some goods and there was an accident and goods fell off a truck and spread throughout. There was a great deal of money that we expended to clean it up, and the fine for that was nil under this part of the act. There was no permit issued. There was nothing, not a thing. The transporter pled ignorance. The owner of the goods was actually in Montreal shipping to somewhere in central Edmonton, and the receiver had said that he was about to apply for storage or something. There was absolutely no prosecution, and when you asked the local police service why that occurred, they said: "Well, nobody understood the act well enough. The prosecutors couldn't find anybody who understood the act well enough or the chemicals that were related to it or who could present some expert advice or expert testimony in order to get a conviction."

So putting the provisions of the act and the penalties up to \$100,000 and two years is tantamount to a very, very painfully bad joke if it can never be enforced. It leads the population to believe that we are being protected and our highways are guarded against having any potentially very dastardly chemicals or explosives and the like being transported, when the penalties for this are virtually nil for the transporter if in fact they are caught.

That pretty well exhausts my concerns today as they relate to the overall bill. I should like to be able to revisit the bill and will have that opportunity in committee. I would like further discussion on all of those matters that I raised and a number of others that I've heard, which I did not repeat today.

Thank you kindly for your time, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would hon. members of the Assembly give unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly four University of Alberta students who are here to see how government works and also to use the library and the facility here. I'd like to ask them to stand, and I'd like to introduce them to the Assembly. They are Erika Borgerson, Paul Anderson, Warren Serink, and our daughter Jacqueline O'Neill. I'd ask them to stand.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Second Reading**
(*continued*)

Bill 13
Alberta Personal Property Bill of Rights

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 13, personal property rights, is of fundamental value for all Albertans. Specifically, it is about what the law calls "tangible personal property." That means property other than land that can be "touched, seen or moved." Land is already dealt with as real property under the Expropriation Act. That act provides a comprehensive compensation scheme for the permanent taking of land by public bodies for public use. Bill 13 provides that tangible personal property owned by Albertans cannot be taken permanently by the Crown by legislation unless there is a process in place for determining and paying compensation for that taking. This principle is set out in section 2 of the bill. We believe as a government that it is essential and right for Albertans.

But we must recognize that there will be times when the taking of permanent title is necessary. These are set out in section 3 of the bill. For example, we can all agree that where property is taken by the Crown as part of a penalty for the breach of a provincial law, this property should not be subject to compensation. An example here is where liquor is seized and destroyed as part of an offence under the Gaming and Liquor Act. As well, property acquired by the Crown as part of normal commercial activities and for nonpayment of provincial taxes, levies, royalties, fines, or penalties is also a necessary exclusion. Of course, where the Crown and the owner of the property make an agreement to transfer the title of the property, that should be exempt from the bill also.

We need to recognize, too, that there may also be situations where there must be other exceptions to the bill. This will be done through regulation, but I stress that these exceptions are designed to be only necessary exemptions. Legislation may be necessary for the Crown to take permanent title to personal property to provide for the health and safety of Albertans and for the proper management of resources in this province. What we have in mind here are situations where we have to destroy animals for health or safety reasons, where we have to dispose of abandoned vehicles or equipment. Where an individual dies who has no heirs or relatives – and it has occurred for centuries – this property also goes to the Crown. These are the kinds of exceptions that are necessary that we are contemplating for regulations.

This bill will override any other enactment of Alberta before or after it comes into force unless an act of this Assembly declares otherwise. This statement is found in section 4 and parallels quite

closely the present situation under the Alberta Bill of Rights. This provision thus reflects the level of importance that we consider the principles of this bill should be accorded.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, this bill will ban the seizure of personal property without compensating the owners. It ensures that the provincial government in Alberta will not be able to seize anyone's property without due process or compensation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we hold the right of property owners in high regard. Thank you.

4:00

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 13 is a bill that pretends to be about property rights. I don't take any issue with the motivation as expressed by the sponsor of the bill. I don't take any issue with the notion that Albertans and I think all Canadians value their enjoyment of property. The problem with Bill 13 is that it is an imposter. It would lead us to believe that the government of Alberta, in sponsoring this bill, is doing something meaningful, is advancing that enjoyment of property somehow. It would be unfortunate to leave Albertans with that impression and to leave them with the impression that this bill does anything more than what can already be found in common law.

Now, there has been from time to time the suggestion made in this Assembly that we need to do something more aggressive about ensuring property rights. In fact, I can recall in 1993 the Member for Calgary-Montrose, I believe it was, who introduced a private member's bill, Bill 210 at that time, the Individual Property Rights Protection Act. That bill was debated in this Assembly, and it was found to be deeply flawed. It didn't define property. It didn't define due process. It didn't really advance the argument for or against property rights at all. So the first thing I did when I noticed this bill on the Order Paper was look at it to see whether or not any of those flaws had indeed been addressed.

I can say that this bill in some technical ways is better than that private member's bill was. This bill talks about property. It defines exactly what it would be relating to, and it does suggest due process. But I defy anybody inside this Assembly or outside this Assembly to pick up a copy of Bill 13, take it home to the kitchen table, sit down, turn to page 1, and start reading it and understand immediately what it is all about, to gain an appreciation of what it would accomplish.

This is not a bill that is written in such a way that it is understandable. This is not a bill that is presented in such a way that you can clearly get a grasp of its intent, of its principle. In fact, some people that I've asked to give me their insight on what this bill may or may not mean have said to me: "It's meaningless. It's a tautology. It is internally contradictory, and in fact it does nothing but confuse the role of the province vis-à-vis the property rights and the enjoyment of property of its citizens." So I wonder what the real motivation of this bill is.

I recall that when the Government House Leader first talked about this bill in a press conference outside the Assembly, he made the observation that this perhaps had something to do with Ottawa's gun control legislation and that perhaps this bill would save Albertans from having their assets seized by a ruthless, heartless, and far too invasive federal government. Then he was asked during that very same press conference: could you tell us under what authority a provincial bill becoming a law would take

precedence over a federal statute? Of course, he said: well, there isn't any authority, and it really wouldn't do that; I was just kind of using that as an example. So the question again was put: well, if there really isn't any authority and the only thing you could think of was hypothetical, that it may have some application to the ability of gun owners to not have their guns seized under this federal bill, and you've just clearly said that that can't happen because this provincial law couldn't really interfere with that federal law, could you give us another example of what this law may accomplish? Mr. Speaker, he didn't give another example. Now, I don't know if that's because no other example exists or if he had an appointment to get to – I have no idea – but there was no other example offered.

So I was waiting for the sponsor of the bill to stand in the Assembly today – I was actually anticipating this, quite looking forward to it – to hear a concrete example of what the bill might accomplish. Unfortunately, I didn't hear one. Now, I may have missed it. I was listening as carefully as I could. There will be some more debate in this House on this bill, so if the sponsor doesn't get another chance to respond or perhaps during the closing of debate or maybe in committee, if another government member who believes that this bill is the right thing to do could let me know so I can let my constituents know just what good this bill could accomplish, I'd be truly appreciative of hearing it.

Now, one thing that I would suggest would make this bill more meaningful, more accessible, and certainly more understandable would be if the drafter of the bill would include a preamble section. Statements of principle and preambles are becoming more and more commonplace in bills, particularly legislation that deals with rights, as this one would purport to do. So a preamble or a statement of principles about the rights – how they're being protected, why they need to be protected, and what the responsibilities on the other side of those rights would be – would be very helpful. The fact that this bill doesn't contain a preamble or a statement of principles indicates to me that it might not be an oversight; it might be because it was impossible to draft one.

Mr. Speaker, the sponsor of the bill, in introducing Bill 13, said that property rights are “of fundamental value for all Albertans.” Now, I don't want to engage in debate on that because I guess that's a matter of opinion and the kind of emphasis that one might put on property versus nonproperty rights, if we can even talk about property rights at all. I wonder if the same could be said: is it a fundamental value that all Albertans should have the right to enjoy timely access to quality health care? That sounds to me like a right that we should have, and that sounds pretty fundamental. How about human rights? This province was one of the leaders in Canada in establishing a human rights law, the Individual's Rights Protection Act. It's not perfect: it could stand an amendment here and there. We have a proud history in this province of identifying rights and protecting them, but you see, it's human rights, rights that are ascribed to people and protected by people. I want to come back to that in a minute. What about safety rights? What about the right to personal safety and security? Certainly those are fundamental values. The right to own a piece of property, to me, takes the concept a bit far afield.

The principles of common law would suggest that there are many, many rights and responsibilities as they pertain to property. Many of the exclusions and provisions in the sections of this bill are actually borrowed from common law practice and precedent. So again I have to ask myself the question: if these are circumstances which have been reinforced through common law – and the last time I looked Alberta was still a common law jurisdiction,

regardless of how some people feel about the judges who sit on the bench in this province. It seems to me that we have one more series of questions raised about the requirement for a bill such as Bill 13. Does this do anything to advance common law? Does it codify it in some way? Does it do anything to challenge or change practice and precedent? Well, it doesn't, Mr. Speaker.

What it says, basically, is that if the Crown does anything that the Crown has a legal right to do, the Crown can still do it, and if the Crown wants to make another law, if the government of Alberta wants to make another law that would contradict in any way this law if this law ever became proclaimed, the government of Alberta could sure do that. It goes on to say that if you lose your property because the Crown says you had to lose your property because it was a penalty, that's still okay too. So I'm wondering what it is in this law that is changed for the people in my constituency, for the people that I visit in all parts of this province. What will I be able to say to him or her that we have accomplished in this Assembly by proclaiming this law? I'm not sure that we're going to be able to say anything.

4:10

In fact, I wonder about this government's reason for even bringing this forward, except of course if it was that sort of chest-pounding, Ottawa-bashing bravado that we see from time to time, that we want to deflect attention away from real, made-in-Alberta problems and issues, and we're going to somehow attack a federal bogeyman and pretend we're being tough and aggressive there. I wonder why this government would even bring this forward. This is a government that has built its career – and the legacy it will leave Alberta will be at least in part – on the notion of smaller government: less intrusion, less law, less regulations. The Member for Peace River even proudly displays that lapel pin about no regulations. So why would a government that is so determined to deregulate, delegislate, cut back, privatize, get rid of, pare down, narrow, and make diminutive the role of this Assembly want to proceed with creating a brand-new law that isn't needed, that doesn't do anything, that seems redundant, even contradictory, and does not advance anybody's understanding of the issue? So I wonder about that, Mr. Speaker, and of course we haven't heard any explanation.

I guess it's worth mentioning that people I talk to are very concerned about rights and responsibilities. I think when people use the word “rights,” they expect that there's a reciprocal or a counterbalancing responsibility or set of responsibilities. So if I understand it properly, people have a right to certain things, but they also have a responsibility to enjoy those rights in a way that does not trample on other people's rights. If we take a look at that kind of a framework for understanding rights and we try to apply it to property, we're left at a dead end. Now, the dead end is this: property can have no rights. Property can have no intrinsic ability to reciprocate. Property can't live up to an obligation. Property can't assume responsibility. Now, I'll give you an example, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, I'll give you an opportunity to speak in a moment. I'll put your name down on the list. Meanwhile, Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He was getting tedious.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, property can't exhibit a reciprocal responsibility. For example, an individual of a certain age in this province has the right to consume alcohol. That's a right; that's a legal right. If you're of a certain age, you can consume

alcohol. You can possess, purchase, consume alcohol. But, you know, alcohol doesn't have any reciprocal responsibility. It's not the alcohol that decides that it's been consumed too much. It's not the alcohol that decides that you shouldn't drive once you've been drinking. It's not the alcohol that makes you say crazy things. It's the individual. The individual has the right, and the right is based on the relationship between and amongst individuals. [interjections]

I hear the Minister of Education shouting epithets as he's fleeing the Chamber, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if he'd stay and participate in debate. Oh, I guess not.

Mr. Speaker, it's the individual. It's people that have these rights and these responsibilities, not the property and in this case not the alcohol, and those responsibilities are based on our relationships. [interjections]

Oh, I hear the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, and I hear the member from Edmonton Tory – I can't remember – saying . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. SAPERS: Oh, it's Edmonton-Whitemud.

. . . that it's the same as VLTs. Well, you know, they've made my point. They've made my point, you see, because the government has a responsibility because it has a relationship with people, and people should enjoy rights that they are legally entitled to by virtue of the contract they have with their government.

One of those reciprocal rights and responsibilities is not to be fleeced by your government, you see. When you talk about VLTs, you've talked about creating a set of circumstances where the government will create an opportunity to tax people through a gambling process, where they've set up all of these computers called VLTs that are programmed to cheat you, to take your money. So it's exactly the point. It's not the VLTs that are the issue. It's the relationship between a government and the governed – okay? – between people. It's that relationship that defines the reciprocal rights and responsibilities, not the object, in this case the VLTs. We could talk about guns or automobiles or alcohol or other objects. Objects don't enjoy rights; people enjoy rights. It's because it's supposed to be about relationships.

Mr. Speaker, what we have is a bill that is dressed up to look good and to sound tough. We have this vague notion that property should have rights or that Albertans have less right to enjoy their property than perhaps another class of Canadians do, which is preposterous, and therefore something needs to be done. It has not been clearly laid out what needs to be done. It's not been clearly established why it needs to be done, and it's not clearly demonstrated in this legislation how it would be done. So what you have is a title of a bill, three pages of typed text, and no substance. Not the kind of bill one would expect from a government that prides itself on less law and less intervention in the lives of people, not the kind of bill that could reasonably be supported. Certainly this member cannot take on blind faith the government's promise that this legislation is benign. You know, it's like saying: I'm from the government and I'm here to help. Nobody buys that, Mr. Speaker, and certainly not any member of the Official Opposition.

Bill 13 may at some point be arguable; Bill 13 may be defensible. But before we come to the final vote on third reading, if this bill should proceed, I will do my best to keep an open mind and to listen to the hon. members opposite should they be able to establish how property can be endowed with rights, how those rights can be protected, and how, if doing so, that would extend

to my constituents, and how it would enhance their ability to enjoy their property. If that simple test can't be met, then this bill simply can't become law.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I guess there's a reason this is Bill 13. I believe there's something fundamentally wrong with a bill that is put forward and does nothing. You know, the hon. member talks about the fundamental value of all Albertans to enjoy property rights. Well, I think there's something fundamentally wrong when you put forward a piece of legislation that rings somewhat hollow, that doesn't do what it's intended to do.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has indicated in this bill that the principle of this bill is to ensure that title to tangible personal property in Alberta shall not be taken without reasonable compensation. Well, I can't see how this bill accomplishes that objective. It really sends out more of a message of being a slogan. As my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has pointed out, I'm just wondering how many Albertans can read this bill and understand what it really means. I'm not so sure. I hope to hear from the other side a lot of debate on this bill, that they're going to stand up in support of this bill and talk about what this bill really does for Albertans, what this bill is supposed to do. So far, you know, other than the member opposite who introduced the bill, the government seems somewhat mute on what it's here to provide.

I believe it flies in the face of the philosophy of this government, that being less intrusion, less intervention, less law. It's quite interesting. This bill is not like a charter. It can be repealed by the government at any time. Any enactment can have a clause that says that it applies notwithstanding this bill. The Lieutenant Governor in Council can make a regulation at any time excepting something from the application of this act. So there's not a lot in here.

4:20

You know, I asked many other people: "What would this actually cover? Name me an instance or an example where this bill could apply." Nobody could give me an answer. It's interesting that there are so many people out there who are looking at this bill and saying: well, I really don't know what it would apply to, and I'm really not sure that it would apply to anything here. There are so many exceptions in the bill.

I think my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora was right when he discussed the need for a preamble. A preamble would certainly allow the average Albertan to pick up this bill and look at the intent of it: what it really means and what it's supposed to do. It doesn't do that.

I guess I have other concerns. This government and the member introducing the bill talk very much about, you know, the rights of property and Albertans to have property rights. Well, what about a patients' bill of rights, which was absolutely ignored in this Legislature, giving those people who need to enter the health care system an opportunity to have some fundamental rights and responsibilities apply to that? I think the government has a duty in that respect. The same with human rights. It's all very fine and dandy to protect somebody's firearms or vehicle or whatever it is, but what about basic human rights in this province? We're a little slack there, you know. We have some

interesting court challenges right now where this government has spent a lot of money, a lot of money, denying a person in this province his basic, fundamental human rights. This government's commitment to property rights far exceeds its commitment to human rights for everybody in this province.

This talks about the Crown acquiring permanent legal title "unless a process is in place for the determination and payment of compensation for the acquiring of that title." I'm not sure what there is that this province would want to acquire permanent legal title to. That's kind of interesting in itself.

The exemptions under this piece of legislation are so many that it's not likely that this bill was intended to be taken seriously. Everything is exempted, and if it's not exempted, it can be exempted. There are contradictory statements in the clauses in this bill. In one section it says that a provincial enactment doesn't affect a person's rights under the act unless there is an act of the Legislature that says that the enactment operates notwithstanding this bill. This contradicts another clause within the bill that says that something can be excepted from application of this bill by regulation. So I'm not quite sure, you know, if the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has thought much about really what this bill is all about.

The whole notion that when you have a right, you have a responsibility applied to that right. That means that if you choose to do something – if you choose to operate a motor vehicle and get your licence, that's a right in this province. But you have to do it within a certain set of guidelines, you have to be responsible, and you have to show that you're able to live up to your responsibilities. If you choose not to do that, then of course things such as fines and licence suspensions and those kinds of things occur.

So that sort of intrigues me. I guess I would have to ask the hon. member what his intent really was with this bill. I guess, you know, we've had indications that it's reflective or predicated on the whole notion of Albertans losing their firearms, possibly, through federal legislation, but the minister says, well, this doesn't apply. One, it can't apply because it's not within the federal jurisdiction. A provincial piece of legislation does not supersede federal legislation. In my mind, it's a disguise so Albertans think they have some rights afforded to them that they really don't have afforded to them.

If we're going to live up to the notion that we don't want to be in the face of all Albertans and we want to pass good legislation and want it to be meaningful and want it to have some substantive substance, then this is not the bill that does it. I am going to close hoping, really hoping that every member sitting on that side has read this bill and knows about it and will get up and add something to it that's going to help us see this as a great piece of legislation, that's going to make this the bill of choice for people in this province and it's going to be meaningful. I'm hoping they can do that. If they don't do that, then I would believe this is nothing more than a slogan bill.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add some comments and raise some questions about Bill 13, the Alberta Personal Property Bill of Rights. To start maybe, as I read the bill, I too was looking for a preamble and proceeded through the bill, because this is the stage of debate where we are to address ourselves to the principles of the bill, trying to

determine exactly what were the underlying principles that the bill was based upon and what kinds of principles the bill was trying to promote. I looked back for sort of the underlying framework of rights legislation, because we have had in this country a great deal of conversation and legislation surrounding our basic rights, and it hasn't been without controversy.

So I think it should be clear in terms of the meaning. What does it mean when we start listing and trying to lay out carefully the rights of citizens? Usually those rights are couched in a number of different categories. The absence of prohibitions is a traditional category; for instance, you can do something and there won't be anything – any law or any individual or any corporation – to prevent you from doing that. The right to a college education: you don't have to do it, but it could be a right with the absence of prohibitions. Rights that imply duties: we're familiar with these, and this is where this particular bill seems to fit; the right, for instance, of citizens to own property, to vote, and to participate in medical insurance and other schemes that are put forward to better their lives.

4:30

There's a category of rights in terms of legal and moral rights. We often combine those categories, and we're often at some pains to make sure that we're clear in which category, moral or legal, a particular right exists or is embedded. There are some that make claims for natural rights. Some philosophers would say that by virtue of being born and being human, there are rights that are naturally ours. I guess what has occupied many countries on the international scene has been the whole area of human rights, and attention has been paid to the kinds of rights that people should enjoy as being citizens, as being members of the human race. It has resulted in some of the most well-known declarations, the UN universal declaration and other declarations of that magnitude, which attempt to lay out what human beings should and could expect and, in that particular case, governments can adhere to or not, depending on their will.

A framework for viewing rights is, I think, necessary to look at this bill. I think the intent of the author of the bill is to promote individual rights, to look at the kinds of liberties that we enjoy and to make that liberty more secure through the provisions of this particular bill. Those kinds of bills, again, are usually aimed at a particular kind of liberty: at personal liberty, at political liberty, or at economic liberty. When we think, often, of personal liberty – our ability to speak freely, to be free to think and to say what we please in a democracy, that we should have the security of our persons and of our houses and our possessions – that's a personal liberty that we all enjoy. We're fond, of course, of protecting and articulating and speaking out in terms of our political liberties: our ability, our freedom, and our right to vote and to participate in the political process and to make sure that we aren't harassed or intimidated in trying to make political decisions. It's an area that Canadians and peoples elsewhere have talked about and protected and defended.

This bill I think falls into economic liberty, intertwined with personal liberties and the rights of individuals to own private property and to not have that property interfered with unreasonably by the state. So it falls under economic liberty. When I read the bill, it sent me to the American example. I looked for their statement of property rights, and in amendment V of the American Bill of Rights, they talk about property rights. To quote from that Bill of Rights, "no person shall be . . . deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law;" – then this is the most important part – "nor shall private property be

taken for public use, without just compensation.” At the basis of that, of course, is the right for individuals to transfer and to dispose of private property without unreasonable government interference. I recommend that language to the sponsor of the bill, because again I believe it was that sponsor’s intent to say just that: that the government shouldn’t be able to interfere unless there’s a clearly laid out process in terms of them securing property, disposing of it, and what someone who has that action taken against them might expect in terms of compensation.

I would like to, if I could, move to the whole business of language, because this is a bill that deserves to be in – and I think the mover of the bill owes it to Albertans to have it in – plain language. If you just look at the bill itself as it’s written, there are 57 lines in the bill that talk about exceptions, other acts, other pieces of legislation. Three lines are about regulations. There’s one line about the role of the Crown, and one line about the proclamation. But 57 lines of the bill, the vast majority of the bill, doesn’t talk about the rights or outline the rights. In fact, the outlining of the rights appears in eight lines. The rest are exceptions or are qualifications.

I think it is a bill that deserves to be written in plain language, and I think that for a number of reasons. The only way we will protect our rights is if citizens know about them, if citizens have access to them, and if citizens are aware of when those rights are being infringed upon. So it has to be language that ordinary, nonlawyer people just interested in civic life can understand. If we go back to the lead-up to the 1993 election, one of the things the government did promise at that time was that there would be a review, a look at legislation, and there would be an attempt to put it into language that was understandable to those of us who are not schooled in the legal profession or don’t have a legal background. There have been a number of bills that have come forward – the living wills bill I think was one of them, and this is another one – that cry out to be written in language that we mortals can understand.

Even the way in those eight lines of the bill that the rights are articulated, it is done negatively. Again, it seems to me that if you look at the language of rights legislation, it often contains rather eloquent language. I know that the ministers of Education and Advanced Education love to play with words and are conscious of language and its use, and maybe they can be leaned upon to provide some language for this bill. It seems to me that it has to be plain, it has to be straightforward, and it has to somehow or other inspire those people who read it. Maybe I am expecting too much from a bill that just deals with personal property, but if it’s important enough to be in front of this Legislature as a bill, if it’s the expectation of the mover that we will as a Legislature act upon this bill, then I think there’s an obligation to make sure that it’s the very best bill it can be and that the intended audience can read it, can understand it, and would be in a position to defend it should it be infringed upon.

So that would be my plea at this stage: that in the bill, whether it’s amended or whatever is done to it, there be some attempt to take that protection of personal property and the wish on the part of the mover of the bill that that property be protected from unusual or unwarranted government interference and make that abundantly clear to those who are interested.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to speak in second reading to Bill 13, the Alberta Personal Property Bill of

Rights. I heard one of my colleagues refer to this as a slogan bill. I wouldn’t like to think that the government would be doing that, but I am having trouble finding anything else in this bill that says what it’s about. It does seem to have an awful lot in here about what it’s not about, which would be the exemptions, and they do go on quite a bit about what is specifically exempted, but it’s not telling me what is not exempted. It’s not telling me what this bill is for, and I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to see if he could give any indication in his introduction of it as to what it was supposed to cover. I did listen carefully, and what I got were things like: the government holds “the right of property owners in high regard.” Well, that’s an interesting sentiment, but it doesn’t tell me what the bill is supposed to be doing except for all of the exemptions that it’s covering, so this won’t have anything to do with destroying animals or collecting abandoned vehicles.

4:40

I look to this government to create good legislation and to create it in a way that it’s easily understood by Albertans and is helpful to their lives, and I cannot see what is helpful to their lives in this bill. So I look forward to a great deal of debate from the hon. members opposite who would be standing to explain what exactly it is this bill is covering, because it’s certainly not spelled out in the bill itself.

There are also a couple of areas – and I hope this is covered either in the responses while we debate it in second reading or in Committee of the Whole – that have to do with what appear to be some contradictions in the bill. It talks about being a bill of rights and that when you have rights, you have responsibilities that go with them. Again, I can’t pull out of this bill what rights are being bestowed here, so I’m at a loss as to what responsibilities are expected back from either the things or the people.

I have to say that I’m deeply offended that the government would be putting forward legislation to entrench rights for things when we still don’t have legislation that protects some people in this province. We still don’t offer protection for gay and lesbian persons under our human rights legislation. We still have not signed the UN declaration on the rights of the child, which would be another group of people who are in need of help with their rights. So I’m offended, frankly, that we would be talking about rights for things, for property, for things you can pick up and move around before we would be looking at offering protection to all of the people that live in Alberta.

There’s been some indication that this bill might be about gun control, and I guess I have a couple of questions about that. What are we doing as provincial legislators – if the rumour I’ve heard is correct – attempting to put forward legislation which would be superseding federal legislation? What is the point of that? As legislators, aren’t we trying to do the best for the people that live in this province and in this country? So why are we having provincial governments at war with federal governments, especially over something like gun control? I hope that that is not what this bill is about. I dearly hope that this is not what this bill is about, particularly when we are still awaiting legislation on domestic violence. To have a bill up that perhaps might be about gun control before we have legislation up on domestic violence, in which guns are used to kill people, particularly women – again I find that deeply offensive.

I truly question the government’s priorities and its care for people if that is indeed what’s going on here. I would love to be contradicted in this. Please, I invite the members opposite to debate this and to continue the debate of this bill in second

reading or even in Committee of the Whole, because I would sure like to hear that what has been suggested to me and some of the things that I've outlined here today is not true. I would really dearly love to hear that, but I am not getting any indications that that will be forthcoming.

I guess I'm also concerned about entrenching property rights aside from the way we already handle it in the Constitution and in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I've never been an admirer of the property rights that are entrenched in the American Constitution. I don't think it is a particularly helpful part of their law. It certainly led to an amazing amount of litigation around property rights. Do we really want to go there? I don't think so, and I hope we don't.

I'm also surprised and disappointed given the government's proclaimed revulsion of extraneous legislation that impinges or interferes with Albertans' lives. How is this bill moving us forward? What additional thing is being given to us? What specifically is the right that is being granted here? We know all the exemptions to what is not being granted, but we don't know exactly what it is that is being granted. This entire bill makes me deeply suspicious of what is going on, what the government is proposing, and why it would be attempting to subvert federal legislation that was overwhelmingly supported by Albertans, no matter how many times you do a poll to prove otherwise. We know that there is support for gun control in this province, including in the rural areas. I am anxious to hear what the members opposite will be saying to give us a better understanding or to illuminate what is the gist of this bill, what is in there. We know what's not in there. What is in there?

I don't want to misinterpret this. I wouldn't normally be casting about and repeating rumours in this Chamber, but I don't have any other information to go on. This bill is not giving me anything else to go on. I know there are others of my colleagues who wish to speak to this bill and I will give way to them in a moment, but I am really concerned about what this bill is hiding, pretending to hide, or trying to hide. It's not clear about what it's trying to put forward.

In closing, I will repeat: if this is about gun control and if this legislation is coming forward before domestic violence legislation, if it's coming forward before strengthening our Individual's Rights Protection Act, it is shameful, and what is going on in this Chamber is shameful because it is putting property – things, guns – before people. We're here as legislators. We're here to do the best we can on behalf of our constituents and the people in Alberta. This is shameful if that is what this is about. And, please, I would love to hear from the hon. members opposite that I am mistaken in what I have been told and the rumours that are swirling about this place.

With that, thank you.

MRS. BLACK: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, you're rising on a point of order?

Point of Order Second Reading Debate

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I guess I've listened to the hon. member, trying to listen to her debating the principles of the bill, which is the stage we are at, second reading. I'd ask her to really focus on the principles within the bill and leave the debate of what is in there – it's 659 *Beauchesne* – and to not divert into the next

stage, which would be committee, to ask the specifics on the various elements and sections of the bill. I think she's diverted quite far off, and we'd be, I think, well served if we focused on the general principles, which is personal property rights. I think it's very important for Albertans to have that. So I would ask her to focus on that.

4:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, which is being cited as 659, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'll apologize if it appears to the member opposite that I was going off from the intent of the bill. To my eye, I will defend everything I said and that I was sticking to the intent of the bill as I could understand it, and I've made a number of comments asking for elucidation from the members opposite as far as what is in this bill.

I had concluded my comments, actually, and didn't feel that I needed to go on anymore. I am looking forward to what will be debated in Committee of the Whole, and I have nothing further to say as far as the content.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, the chair would hold that 659 may have been in order, but as the chair heard the hon. member, wanting to know what the bill actually did stand for, if that's the frame of reference the hon. member has, then it is difficult to give a strict adherence to 659. But as I would read 659, the main import here is that "It is not regular on this occasion, however, to discuss in detail the clauses of the bill." This is not an amending bill, but if it were an amending bill, then it becomes very awkward not to violate 659. However, inasmuch as the hon. member has concluded her speech at this point, no point of order is necessary.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on this bill, although it's so painfully thin that it's hurtful to have such a meaningless and thinly worded bill come before this Legislature when there are so many other bills that need some careful attention and can actually change the way this province operates on behalf of the people of Alberta.

It's a sad day when we deal with a bill such as this, and we wonder: what's the motivation? On this side we're at a loss to understand what anyone would be looking for other than a gun law. I mean, that's the best I can read from it, and certainly I haven't heard any argument from the other side at all to say what the key provision is. What is it in this bill that says this is what's fundamentally lacking in this society? Where is it? This province has gone from 1905 to this date without this law, and certainly the sky hasn't fallen. We haven't had Chicken Littles running around telling us that that's about to occur. I'm at a loss to understand what's so urgent about this that this bill comes before so many other pieces of legislation that need to be discussed. I mean, there are health care and education and fundamental taxation. There are so many areas for debate and time to be spent in this Legislature where we could actually accomplish something and be seen to accomplish something, but this is painfully thin.

I mean, there isn't even a short description on the front end of the document, before the definitions, that says what this bill will do. How do I take this to my barber and tell him what it means?

I have no idea. He looks at it and says: "Great. You guys sure are wasting a lot of our money putting forward this stuff."

MR. MAR: Is that where you usually get your advice out of the Assembly?

MR. WHITE: No. It's been brought to my attention – the hon. member from the other side has asked that I identify the location where I get my advice on these things. Well, my barber is a voter. My barber is a taxpayer. He is a good person. He does a half-decent job on a tough case. [interjection] That's the tough case. It is important that bills in this Legislature speak to him. Perhaps he's not the most sophisticated of students when it comes to politics, but it does affect him and he doesn't understand it. He's in a business that deals with people all of the time, and he would dearly love to be able to tell people.

Run down the list of the bills that are before this Legislature. If we're only going to have a sitting once a year and we're at Bill 13 and this is the 13th most important piece of legislation and it doesn't even say what it's about and nobody on the government side can say that this is specifically the ill that this bill addresses – well, I don't know. The government could easily be described as bankrupt if this is all that can be put forward.

I understand human rights, and I understand a lot of rights as they relate to the Charter. There are those that I've heard perhaps only under their breath in this Legislature, but certainly those have said that the Charter of Rights should never have been enacted, that we were well served well before that. We didn't need all of these challenges. We didn't need all of that legislation. We were doing just fine. It weren't broke. How come we went and tried to fix it? Well, it's a classic case. In this piece, what's bust? Is there something broken here that I don't know about? Did I miss something here? I don't know.

Or is it that the kissin' cousins of this government, the Reform Party of Canada – sorry; I have to say it properly, and the record should record the thump, thump, thump. The non kissin' cousins, I guess, the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, doesn't have anything to say about gun control. They seem to be silent on it. But the Reform Party is going on at great length about the dangers of collecting guns, and quite frankly I haven't seen the hue and cry in my neighbourhood. Mind you, mine happens to be an urban neighbourhood, and quite frankly I'm quite happy that there's not a lot of people packing guns about, because there's not a lot of gophers hanging around.

DR. WEST: You come up to my area. There's lots of them.

MR. WHITE: I don't know; the last time I saw a wolf running through Vegreville was quite awhile ago. In Vermilion certainly you don't have any wild critters that need to be put out of their misery. I don't know.

DR. WEST: Just a few Liberals.

MR. SMITH: There are not many of them left.

MR. WHITE: I think you got most of those Liberals there already, Steve; didn't you? You dealt with them rather well.

The point is this. I haven't got anything to tell my friends and neighbours and barber about this bill that some people can tell me the other side of. Please inform me as to the rationale for this. Is this some kind of a veiled attempt to stave off what another

elected government is doing? I don't know. It's beyond me to figure out what this bill says.

Now, until such time as someone from that side can tell me what this bill means, I'm going to be against this bill. I don't understand why we would have this piece of frivolous fluff here if there wasn't some good purpose and the government could stand in this Legislature and explain it so that I can tell my barber, all of his friends, all of my friends, and the people that I represent in Edmonton-Calder what it actually means. I'm going to be against this bill and stand foursquare on that.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to adjourn debate on this particular bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 13. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

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.

[Adjourned debate February 5: Mr. Hancock]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the opportunity to address the motion in reply to the speech from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I am both inspired and compelled to participate in this debate and to speak about the future of our great province. Indeed, that's where we should be focused, and that's what the speech was all about. That's where this government is focused, on the future, on a bright future, a positive future for our children and for our province.

5:00

I was inspired by the speech, because as a member who first had the privilege of joining you in this Chamber in 1997, the throne speech speaks to many of the messages which I heard from the people of Edmonton-Whitemud during the election and have continued to hear from them through the summer and fall of consultation, Growth Summit, and planning. It speaks to the vision and priorities always espoused by this government and the political party under whose banner most of us in this House were elected. That vision, those priorities put people first.

So I am inspired, but I'm also compelled to speak to this debate, compelled because as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and as a member from Edmonton, having heard and read what other members from Edmonton have said – I should hasten to add, members of another political party not holding the

same values and principles – all I've heard is that the sky is falling, that there is impending doom, that the future of our province is in peril. I wonder if those members heard and read the same speech that I heard.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it reminds me, if you'll permit me, of a passage from C.S. Lewis's first book in the *Chronicles of Narnia* where Uncle Andrew, who reminds me of the Liberals, is referred to, and the government of course is the lion.

When the Lion had first begun singing, long ago when it was still quite dark, he had realized that the noise was a song. And he had disliked the song very much. It made him think and feel things he did not want to think and feel. Then, when the sun rose and he saw that the singer was a lion . . . he tried his hardest to make believe it wasn't singing and never had been singing – only roaring as any lion might in a zoo in our world. "Of course it can't really have been singing," he thought, "I must have imagined it . . . Who ever heard of a lion singing?" And the longer and the more beautiful the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did. He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song. Soon he couldn't have heard anything else even if he had wanted to.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have heard nothing else.

Mr. Speaker, I want to dwell on the positive to ensure that this House and all Albertans will know that the message to government and to the world from Edmonton is not one of despondency. It's not one of depression but rather a message of excitement, of hope, of caring and compassion fueled by people who know that there is opportunity in Edmonton and that Edmonton is a great place to live and to work and to do business.

[The Speaker in the chair]

What have we heard? Well, first let me compliment the Leader of the Official Opposition for something he did get right. He said of the greatness of a society that

you measure it in the strength of its people, in their ability to think and to challenge and to envision a future world, to create opportunities, to envision those opportunities, and to realize those opportunities for them in the future.

He went on to say:

Those aren't just economic opportunities. Those are opportunities in culture and in art. Those are opportunities to be able to relate to people in a civil and decent way. There are opportunities to know that there is a richness, not just a financial richness but a richness in values and morals and education and thought for our family members and for our neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, in that small portion of his comments the hon. Leader of the Opposition was absolutely right. During that small portion of his comments I began to think that there was hope, that he and his party finally understood what this is all about, but alas the illusion was immediately shattered as he descended immediately and rapidly towards the muck.

The continuing theme for members opposite has been a criticism of the government and the throne speech for, quote, putting money first and people second. Mr. Speaker, nothing – nothing – could be further from the truth. They are wrong.

The essence of this government is in the very beginning of the speech, which the Liberals conveniently and quite improperly skipped right over:

Preparing for the future is very important to Albertans. Our greatest obligation is to leave our children and our grandchildren a province that is even better than the one which was left to us.

This is the mission to which my government rededicates itself as we approach a new millennium. Our young people must be our top priority.

That is why we're here, Mr. Speaker. That is what this is all about.

It is true that the speech moves into an outline of Alberta's strong fiscal foundation, and there should be no apology for that. In three short paragraphs, less than half a page in a six-page speech, the speech highlights the value of the past five years of hard work. Without a strong fiscal framework, a solid foundation our work towards building a better future would be crippled. The worst legacy we could leave would be one of crippling debt load for our children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren to pay off. This doesn't mean that the focus is money. It means that we recognize the reality that no matter how laudable the goal, no matter how pressing the need, no matter how compelling the cause, we do no one any favour by crippling the future to deal with the present.

That doesn't mean that money is the most important thing or the most important measure. It means that we on this side recognize that the way we can best improve the opportunities of Albertans is to make sure that scarce resources are not wasted but are effectively channeled to where they can do the most good. Anyway you slice it, a dollar spent on debt servicing is a dollar which cannot be used for reinvestment, for building, and to help where there is need. Even with all of the hard work of the last five years we still have to spend more than a billion a year on interest.

I heard clearly from Albertans in Edmonton-Whitemud that they agreed with the government. While quality, accessible health care and opportunity for their families to access a quality education were their primary concerns, they fundamentally agreed that the government direction in balancing the budget and paying off the debt were absolutely necessary.

Two things can make Alberta a better place: ensuring that every Albertan has the opportunity to be the best that he or she can be and ensuring that where there are barriers to those opportunities, we act collectively to remove those barriers, to build bridges, to create infrastructure which will encourage and allow Albertans to overcome the obstacles and to look boldly ahead. The best way we can remove those barriers to help people help themselves is by having a strong economy. A strong economy provides opportunities.

The last five years have not solely been about getting out of debt. It's been about changing the way we do things. We live in an era of phenomenal change, and it's not good enough – in fact it's disastrous – to stand still, to keep doing things exactly as they were done last year. So it is necessary to redefine government, to rethink its role, to recognize that government does not have a mandate to single-handedly cure or attempt to cure all of society's woes or to be the collective conscience of man. But it does have a responsibility to provide those things which can best be provided by people working together with government in partnership constantly striving to be creative and to find new and better ways.

Education, so that, as His Honour said, people can "develop their full potential and . . . contribute actively to their families, their workplaces, and their communities." To achieve excellence in our province we need to promote the highest standards of education. Our future will require that we think broadly, adapt quickly, and take advantage of every opportunity. Our schools and teachers need the technology and resources required to foster learning. Prudent management of education funds together with innovation will be needed to ensure that the best opportunities for education are there for all Albertans' lifelong learning.

In the area of health, because a healthy community means so much more than just acute care treatment, we recognize that we want to know that when mom or dad or our children need it, it will be there and it will be high quality. Continued work is required to ensure that these goals are met and that we can make optimal use of the time, talent, and education of all our health care professionals.

And in infrastructure, because as we channel our energy towards building our communities, we don't want to be slowed down by inadequate or decaying buildings and roads, by outdated technologies, by not having the tools we need to do the job. But, again, we must be constantly alert to the need for change and innovation. We can't afford to build for the models of the past.

And, yes, Mr. Speaker, people: encouraging and assisting people to be self-sufficient but helping those who cannot manage alone. We must develop new partnerships between government and the community to provide services without the bureaucracy of government and with a level of caring and resourcefulness that the community is known to achieve. We have to focus on children. When we ensure that our children have the resources they need, we reduce suffering, and we create independence.

Our environment: as stewards of this province we hold it in trust for future generations. We have an obligation to pass on to our children a cleaner, better place. We can develop our natural resources, but we must do so on a sustainable basis with balanced and effective standards, properly enforced to preserve our environment.

And in our economy: leadership in recognizing that while we get out of the way of today's economy, we need to encourage a long-term view. We compete in the global market, and our natural resources, our current advantage, will not always be there.

5:10

Science and research: information and services will be the engine of tomorrow. And what will be our advantage? Simply that we have friends and relatives in all parts of the world. Canada is truly a stable and cosmopolitan country, recognized as such everywhere. Two thrusts taken by our government will contribute: fostering innovation and investment in research and technology and continuing the strong leadership of our Premier in renewing our federation by both carrying forward the Calgary initiative and by continuing to take a strong lead in negotiating federal/provincial roles and responsibilities.

I must single out particularly Alberta's aboriginal people. While the federal government has the primary responsibility to ensure that treaty obligations are met, we have both a legal and a moral responsibility: legal responsibilities towards land claims settlements which we acquired under the natural resources transfer agreement in the 1930s and for which resolution is long overdue and moral responsibilities towards dealing effectively with an even greater need in the aboriginal community, to tear down barriers to self-reliance and to help them build an effective governance model for their people.

Mr. Speaker, that is what I heard and read in the Speech from the Throne, a positive message of hope and understanding, an inspiring message that says that the government listened to the

input from the election and the Growth Summit, a vision of the future that we can all share in and can all participate in.

I was elected in Edmonton-Whitemud to bring a message to government. People in Edmonton-Whitemud understood that they could more effectively deliver that message to government by sending someone into government rather than by having someone criticize from the other side. The message was that while we agreed with the direction government was taking in getting the fiscal house in order and paying down the debt, we're concerned about health care and education and wanted to be certain that both would be there when needed. With this Speech from the Throne I can say that the message is delivered, the work has begun, and together we will ensure that "children will come first in the house we call Alberta."

I can also say that I'm proud to be part of this government, a government which is based on principles established by our party in 1990 towards innovation, commitment, excellence, integrity, caring, future oriented, conservative, self-reliant, recognizing the importance of family and community, environmental stewardship, and fiscal responsibility.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, let me just say what an honour and a privilege it is to be able to serve Edmonton-Whitemud and Alberta in this House. Every day as I come up the front steps, I'm reminded of that privilege and the awesome responsibility that it carries with it. Governance has always been important to me, and I've spent a good part of my life encouraging people to be involved in the political process, to be a part in creating their preferred future.

But many people do not hold politicians in high regard. The Leader of the Opposition referred to the Black Rod ceremony and your effort thereby to bring some credence, some ceremony, some respect to democratic institutions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose said in his comments, "You cannot win the respect of other people if you do not respect yourselves." He's absolutely right in both his comment and with respect to the matter on which he was commenting. If we as individual members do no other thing, we would do well to leave this place even better than the one which was left to us.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we do now adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, unless I do a remarkable review of the rules, I think it's impossible for an hon. member to both adjourn the debate and adjourn the house.

MR. HANCOCK: I would move that we adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:13 p.m.]